

'If the desert could speak': The *karretjiemense* of the Karoo in *My Children Have Faces*

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Both film-maker Timothy Gabb and anthropologist Michael de Jongh have noticed the disappearance of the *karretjiemense*, a marginalised people who travel the Karoo desert using donkey carts or *karretjies*. Having run a petrol station in Prince Albert in the Eastern Cape, author Carol Campbell's debut novel *My Children Have Faces* features a family of *karretjiemense* who wander the Karoo desert and in real ways 'belong to' it. This belonging is reflected in the novel through the 'interchanges and interconnections between [their] human corporeality and the more-than-human', which ecocritic Stacey Alaimo calls 'transcorporeality'. It is an engagement that enables the resilience of the tight-knit family to the vulnerabilities of living in the desert in order to escape the pursuit of the murderous Miskiet. Campbell reflects this transcorporeality, fictionally, through naming, through animal imagery and through the motifs of smell and of movement. She also registers how transcorporeality dwindles and family unity breaks down once they leave the desert. Having sold their donkeys and killed Miskiet, they apply for the formal identities they have lacked and head towards a settled life in the village very different to the nomadic life that has defined them up to now.

Contribution: This article adds to the emerging field of ecocriticism in South Africa by using the concept of 'transcorporeality' to explore the connections between the *karretjiemense* and the desert Karoo environment in Carol Campbell's *My Children Have Faces* (2013).

Keywords: animal imagery; deserts; ecocriticism; *karretjiemense*; Karoo; resilience; transcorporeality; vulnerability.

In Timothy Gabb's 2019 documentary *The Lost Carts of the Karoo*, Isak Louw, son of one of the last *karretjiemense*, reflects about his people: '*Karretjiemense is dood, hulle bestaan nie meer nie. As die droëland kan praat, dan sal dit net oor geskiedenis wees van ons voormense*' (2:07–2:20). Translated, he is saying: 'The *karretjie* people are dead, they don't exist anymore. If the desert could speak, it would just talk about the history of our ancestors'.

Gabb's documentary is itself an attempt to enable the desert to 'speak'. His interest in the '*karretjiemense*' began while he was a journalism student at Rhodes University, some 10 years before. During a visit to Nieu-Bethesda, the small Karoo town famous for artist Helen Martin's Owl House, he encountered a group of *karretjiemense* – sheep-shearers who had in the past traversed the Karoo on their donkey carts or '*karretjies*' (Cape Talk Interview 2019). In 2012, he began work on a short film based on this experience. He explains, in a related article for *GroundUp*, that the *karretjiemense* were abandoning their nomadic lifestyle because 'farmers have started using outsourced, unionized teams of shearers from Lesotho ... with electrified shears [*which*] has rendered the *karretjiemense* redundant' (2013). Over the next 6 years, Gabb developed his short film into a documentary, which tells the story of a family of *karretjiemense* now retired and settled in Colesberg in the Eastern Cape. The documentary features Oupa Lodewyk Slingers and his wife Sina Louw who, with their 12 sons, earned a living shearing sheep, moving from farm to farm.

Anthropologist Michael de Jongh has carried out considerable work on the *karretjiemense*. Interviewed in Gabb's documentary, he concurs with Isak's observation. In time, he says, 'you won't find *Karretjie* people around anymore, in the sense of a lifestyle' (Gabb's 2019:1:27–1:42). In an earlier article, he calls the *karretjiemense* 'rural foragers – the modern nomads of the Great Karoo' (2002:442), emphasising that they identify themselves by reference to their mode of transport (p. 442). In her 2009 Master's thesis supervised by him, Sarah Adriana Steyn says 'Most of the *Karretjie* People of the Karoo district of Colesberg are descendants of ... early hunter-gatherers (San) and nomadic pastoralists (Khoekhoen)' (2009:74), observing that 'many members of the present farming community still relate tales about the San and Khoekhoen in the district,

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as told by their parents and grandparents' (2009:74). Subsequent genetic research confirms her view (Schlebusch, De Jongh & Soodyall 2011).

De Jongh points out, however, that there is no 'direct historical continuity' (2002:442) between the nomadic lifestyles of the *karretjiemense* and that of their /Xam-speaking ancestors. The discontinuity came about because of colonial conflicts. Despite prolonged resistance by the Khoekhoen and San during the 18th century, many so-called tame bushmen had been captured as children by colonial commandos with the aim of transforming these indigenous inhabitants of the land into a 'stable labour force' (De Jongh 2002:448), thus drawing the Khokhoen and San into the 'colonial agricultural economy' (2002:447). But by the end of the 19th century, 'the growth in demand for wool and the spread of wire fencing combined to alter the labour requirements on the large sheep farms in the Great Karoo' (De Jongh 2002:447). So the sheep shearers returned to the nomadic lifestyle of their forebears, first on foot and later using donkey carts. As itinerants, remarks De Jongh, the *karretjiemense* are 'even more vulnerable than conventional farm labourers' (2002:451), because they are without permanent homes and their sheep-shearing work is not reliable, as it is affected by both unseasonal rain and unusually dry seasons. The Great Karoo environment in which the *karretjiemense* lead their precarious existence is an extremely hostile one. De Jongh describes it as 'the vast area of arid scrubland and flat-topped mountains that covers a great deal of South Africa's central plateau' (2002:442). Receiving as little as 400 mm, and in the north-west less than 200 mm of rain annually, with the winter months almost completely dry, it is categorised, according to thegreatkaroo.com website, as an arid, semi-desert zone.

Vulnerability, although, is often linked to resilience. Geographers Neil Adger and Karina Brown define the two concepts in relation to each other. As they point out, 'inherent risks [*environmental, social, economic*] ... experienced by people and communities living in particular places' often engender an 'ability of people and ecosystems together to adapt to changing risks and opportunities' (2009:109). Like Gabb's documentary and De Jongh's and Steyn's academic work, Carol Campbell's debut novel *My Children Have Faces* (2013) features *karretjiemense* as its main characters: itinerants who wander the desert and in real ways 'belong to' it. It is our purpose in this article to examine her depiction of these people and their survival in the Great Karoo.

Although the novel received warm reviews when it was first published, few critics have written extensively about it. One of these is Susan Meyer, writing mostly in Afrikaans about the Afrikaans translation of the novel, *Karretjiemense*. In her 2021 overview article in English for *Journal of Literary Studies*, she locates a discussion of the text within the second of five themes she identifies as 'most extensively researched by ecocritical readings of Afrikaans narrative works' (p. 88). This includes 'literature [*that*] focuses on depicting natural surroundings as intimate personal places', in which 'place is

linked to a sense of human identity' (2021:88). Citing her 2014 article, '*Ons is mense. My kinders hét gesigte. Die natuurlike omgewing en die konseptualisering van die self in Karretjiemense* (Carol Campbell)', she emphasises the characters' 'clear sense of belonging to the earth and the Karoo' (2021:99). Despite the 'negative, socially constructed identity ... that results from their homelessness, illiteracy and low social standing', she argues, 'none of these family members is depicted without self-worth and self-respect', discovered 'through their individual interaction with and response to elements of nature in the semi-desert Karoo' (Meyer 2021:99). Indulging in a spot of self-praise, she reflects that her 2014 article 'gives a reasoned and quite relevant exposition of the issue of authenticity in portraying the "karretjie"-characters' reality' (p. 99). Accordingly, as they do with the anthropological studies undertaken by Steyn and De Jongh, Campbell's characters certainly do reveal convincing authenticity. Although like Meyer we are interested in their interaction with the desert, we do not agree that this interaction uncomplicatedly brings them self-worth and self-respect. Rather, the novel traces a range of processes at play in their experiences and their identities, which remain fluid to the end.

Also focusing on identity formation, Adebola Fawole draws on the theories of Erik Erikson to consider 'from a generational point of view' (2019:12936) the different reactions to abuse shown by Muis and her daughter Witpop. Fawole finds in the novel 'a positive progression in the use of metaphors from the mother to the daughter' – a progression, which she reads as giving hope that 'generations of daughters will move and act beyond their mothers' fears to construct identities that cannot be trampled upon' (2019:12942). This redemptive reading of the novel is based on an analysis of animal metaphors used by the characters about themselves, and, although selective and at times inaccurate, is a line of enquiry we will pursue in this study.

In two separate articles, Naomi Nkealah focuses on the violence against women (VAW) that she finds evident in the novel and formulates, from her reading of this and other recent fiction by women writers, a 'new feminist theory', which she terms 'cameline agency'. This emphasises the 'ability of oppressed women to act decisively to change their circumstances and regain control of their lives' (2017:123). Commendable as her intentions might be, her model shapes her reading of Campbell's novel in curious and idiosyncratic ways. At the outset, among all the important animals in *My Children Have Faces*, there are no camels. Treating Witpop's shooting of Miskiet as a 'cameline' reaction to abuse overlooks the details that Witpop suffers violence at the hands of her parents not Miskiet, that she shoots him to protect her mother not herself; and that both her brother and father – male figures – have protected Muis before this. Reading irony in the fact that 'an abusive white [*sic*] man dies by the gun ('a symbol of male power') ignores Miskiet's weapon of choice – his knife. And emphasising, in her more recent article, 'state negligence' (Nkealah 2021:230) in responding to the plight of especially Khoisan women misreads the 'state ignorance' that has arisen because Muis has never applied

for documentation. Nor does Campbell single Muis out as dehumanised, because her treatment of all her characters is even-handed. This is particularly evident in her presentation of male violence and Muis' complex responses to it, including her recognition of the dynamics that drive it, and her sense that her occasionally violent partner Kapok is actually scared of her. Perhaps most pernicious is Nkealah's reading of the family and their *karretjie* as representative. The novel is, in fact, not about 'the plight of the Khoisan people' (2021:230) or 'the state's neglect of the Khoisan and its failure to meet their developmental needs' (2021:232); or its 'failure to take proactive steps ... to visibilise the Khoisan' (2021:233). It is about a specific family and their specific pursuer, Miskiet. Indeed Nkealah's use of racial categories does the novel as a whole, and Campbell's nuanced and authentic rendition of her characters, an injustice. She reads Miskiet as white, in the face of considerable evidence that marks him as mixed race: his name (Afrikaans for mosquito); the flick-knife he carries (p. 39); his 'yellow' skin (p. 47); the two-roomed house he shares with his brother in the '*lokasie*', next door to 'Ting-a-Ling' (p. 83); the 'blue overall' he wears (p. 84); the 'government road work' he tries for in Beaufort West (p. 23); and the glinting 'stone' in his front tooth (p. 120). Moreover, he is characterised quite specifically as pathological. His neighbours call him a '*malletjie*' (p. 23); he is epileptic; he is obsessed with Muis and even compared with other violent men; his relish in brutality is extreme. Nor is it useful or accurate to label the family 'Khoisan'. While Nkealah is rightly concerned about their plight, categorising them this way does little more than enable her to sermonise about the role and obligations which the state has not fulfilled: a concern she imports into the novel. More academic studies of the *karretjiemense* avoid racialising them, rather using terms such as 'itinerant', 'peripatetic' and 'nomadic', which foreground the lives they lead (see De Jongh & Steyn 1994 and subsequent work by them). As indicated here, our reading of Campbell's novel will explore, rather, the ways in which their identities draw from and respond to their desert environment and the changes they undergo when they leave it.

In doing so, it will follow an approach that is broadly aligned with Meyer's ecocritical work, but will focus on the 'transcorporeality' that characterises the family's life in the desert and the tensions between their vulnerability and their resilience that play out during the course of the novel. Our reading will be informed, also, by the sense that:

[T]here is no environment, only an ensemble of elements recycled through every existing thing. The environment does not wrap around the person for his [*sic*] regal contemplation: the person is the environment and the environment is the person. (As ecocritic Harold Fromm asserts 2013:190)

It is for this disappeared distinction between environment and person that feminist ecocritic Stacy Alaimo coins the term 'transcorporeality' – which names 'the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from "nature" or "environment"' (2008:238). Thus, transcorporeality emphasises 'the interchanges and

interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human' (2008:238). As Caitlin Duffy puts in, in a review of Alaimo's work, the concept signals a profound shift in our understanding of our subjectivity: 'where there was once a clear, bounded human subject, there is now a material self that is tangled with outside networks that are "economic, political, cultural, scientific, and substantial"' (2018:20).

As Meyer shows, the desert environment is fundamental to defining and constructing the identity of the *karretjiemense*. Recognising the transcorporeality of their lives in the desert enables us to take her point further: to notice their many 'interchanges and interconnections' with the 'more-than-human' and to see how 'entangled' they are with its natural and animal world. In the first place, the Karoo marks their origins. Muis, the mother, was born in a *moddergat* [a mud-hole] (Campbell 2013:18), and her two daughters 'in the veld under the *karretjie*' (p. 22). Correspondingly, they imbue the Karoo environment with human presence and meaning. Fansie, the son, names a star after his little sister who died and sings to it when he is alone (p. 73). While he feels the song would be too sad for his mother to hear, she in fact accepts and acknowledges this naming (p. 74). The plants and animals of the Karoo provide the family with livelihood, with food and with self-esteem. And their knowledge of this environment enables them to survive the drought and to escape the predations of their pursuer Miskiet. The main characters are routinely seen and see themselves in animal terms. And they have animal and insect names, whose changes towards the end of the novel reflect changes in their 'animal' identities. The environment is inscribed into their bodies, so their habitual smell combines dirt, smoke, sheep and sweat. It sharpens their awareness of the clean-scented Miskiet and thus enables them to escape him. Their movements are adapted to the desert and aligned with the motion of the donkeys who draw the *karretjie* they use to traverse it. Once displaced into the town, the family members must realign themselves with the 'economic, political, cultural, scientific, and substantial' networks they encounter in its urban environment. By the end of the novel, they have renounced their lives on the donkey cart; vanquished Miskiet; interacted with townspeople; and acquired formal identities. Vulnerable as they have been, and remain, their transcorporeality with the desert has given them resilience that has enabled them to do all this.

Indeed, the desert environment imbues Campbell's narrative. Unlike Gabb's documentary and de Jongh and Steyn's anthropological work, her novel is a work of fiction and thus makes use of fictional techniques. One of these is shifting first person narration, with successive short chapters named after and told by the different main characters: the members of the family who are travelling together, and their pursuer Miskiet who wants to claim Fansie as his son and to kill Muis. The brevity of the chapters and the constantly shifting perspective lends tension and urgency to this predator-prey relationship, especially as it bears down on Muis.

Another technique Campbell uses is naming, which works to characterise each of the figures and to reflect the interaction and the relationships among them. Their nicknames, especially, emphasise that the family members lack formal identities and so cannot be officially registered or access the social benefits of education, healthcare and, crucially, police protection. It is because of this that, at Muis's behest, they avoid the towns and must find ways of surviving in the increasingly barren desert. Especially, the nicknames of the adult characters are animal- and insect-related. Fansie explains his mother's name:

[F]rom the beginning of her life, Mamma has been a quiet, hidden-away person. That's why she is called Muis. She is a little mouse that doesn't make a noise and hides from snakes and cats and people. (Campbell 2013:71)

(This characterisation shifts considerably towards the end of the novel). Muis's partner was, in the past, 'strong Joseph'. But after his donkey cart tipped over and crushed his leg, he was left hobbling like a chicken, a '*kapok*' (p. 12). Their pursuer is Miskiet, the mosquito whose whine is the only sign of its presence, besides its guerrilla attacks to bite and suck blood of its victims. Miskiet is an epileptic who wanders in a fugue in the bush, who wakes at times with a pillow blood-soaked from biting his tongue. Kapok knows him as '*malletjie* [madman], with eyes that looked right through you' (p. 47) – evincing an insect-like absence of human consciousness and human recognition.

Towards the end of the novel, the family succeed in getting officially registered, and their names are formalised. Kapok is revealed to be 'Joseph Bitterbessie' (Campbell 2013:126), and Muis is revealed to be 'Christina Muishond'. Like Joseph's, her 'church name' (p. 28) reflects her mother's (and her own) religious allegiances. Because Muis and Kapok are not married, the children take their mother's surname: 'Johannes Stephanus Muishond. Charmaine Eloise Muishond. Elisma Magrieta Muishond'. The Home Affairs official who gets them identity documents is moved to remark: 'Beautiful, careful names given to each child by their mother' (p. 128). Revealed thus late in the novel, Muis' surname is structurally significant. In the beginning, she describes herself as a dog 'on a chain. One end of the chain is attached to a pole hammered into hard earth and the other is rubbing my ankle raw' (p. 11). The 'pole' is Miskiet, whom she has spent 15 years evading because she knows he will kill her. Once she acquires papers, her formal surname combines her nickname with this 'dog' identity. A *muishond* is a mongoose – a creature that looks soft and friendly but is actually a fierce predator that can kill and eat snakes. Muis identifies herself with the *muishond* she sees on a river bank under the moon that night: '*Ek is ook 'n muishond*', she tells it and makes the undertaking, 'I will not hide anymore', that signals the end of their lives as fugitives (p. 139).

Their nicknames, and Muis's surname, thus align them with the animals and insects of their environment. A broader fictional technique Campbell uses is pervasive animal imagery, which reflects 'the interchanges and interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human', and

presents the characters as selves 'tangled with' natural and especially animal networks as Alaimo and Duffy, respectively, put it (2008:238, 2018). The range of creatures that feature in the novel is extensive: dogs, snakes, birds, sheep, pigs, spiders, bees, buck, aardvarks, cats and, of course, donkeys. As well as having autonomous existence within the desert environment, these creatures are used by Campbell to characterise the different members of the family, through identification or dissociation; through analogy; and through encounter and relationship. The next section of this study will examine the novel's animal imagery in more depth.

The members of the family are often seen in animal terms, by one another and especially by Miskiet. When the family returns to Leeu Gamka, he is lying in wait. Planning his attack, he broods on Muis's rejection of him: 'That filthy, scrawny chicken, who should be scratching around the backyards of a *lokasie*, turned her back on me' (Campbell 2013:106). He resents her because she has turned 'his' child into a 'filthy rat'. Fansie, he observes, is starved, 'dressed in lappe, and the look of a jackal is in his eyes' (p. 82). The 'chicken', 'rat' and 'jackal' analogies are insulting, of course, but they also indicate Miskiet's perception of the members of the family as animals.

More extensively, the characters see themselves in animal terms. Muis, for example, describes having taught her children to hide in the veld: 'When a farmer chases us off his land, three sets of little eyes watch, like duikers, ready to run' (Campbell 2013:22). The same simile is used much later when Miskiet visits their camp, and Muis notices how 'Fansie has vanished like a *duikertjie* in the dark' (p. 58). Fansie is himself a successful hunter, and when he catches a real buck, he reflects: 'Mamma needs this meat so they can all eat. This *duikertjie* will give us her legs and make us able to run' (p. 79). In his view, the animal will both provide sustenance and confer on them her attributes of speed and endurance. Witpop, by contrast, twice refers to herself as a snake. Reacting to the town children who jeer at her she says 'so I spit like a snake' (p. 16). And when the family halts on their long trip to Oudtshoorn, she washes herself and her ragged clothes in the river. 'When I walk out', she says, 'I pretend I am a snake and I lie on the rock next to my clothes and let myself dry' (p. 94). The reptile image is elemental and briefly enables her to forget her aspirations for bodily comfort.

Animal imagery also reflects the ways in which Fansie learns from his environment. He draws on his encounter with a '*slim slang*' [a clever snake] to catch a bird: 'I lie still, somewhere near water, and think I am a puff adder. A puff adder that has its whole life to catch one bird. *Kurr, kurr, kurr*. I listen to the doves talking. Be a puff adder. *Bly stil, bly stil*. Then in one move I grab it' (p. 112). Sometimes, he eats the birds he catches but 'most days I let them fly away because they teach me that, if I lie still, I can catch them' (p. 112).

Besides the instance quoted earlier, Muis uses the dog and chain image of herself many times. In Chapter 12, she

augments the image with details of the damage she has endured and Kapok's unrealistic expectations:

[A]fter all this time, I have raw sores where this chain has cut through to my flesh. Kapok thinks I will lick Miskiet's hand, then lie at his feet asking for forgiveness. The one who raped me, the one who took away the only person who cared. (Campbell 2013:45)

Her irony makes clear her resistance to his expectation. When they reach Baas Johan's farm where Miskiet attacks, 'the chain tightens around my ankle and I feel Miskiet moving into our circle again' (p. 76). Besides depicting Muis as prey, the image manifests her constant awareness of Miskiet and his threatening pursuit of her. Miskiet's own references to dogs confirm his brutality: he has knifed one of his neighbour Ting-a-Ling's dogs in the past (p. 115) and threatens to kick another to death if it barks at him (p. 85). Anticipating killing Muis, he compares her corpse to a dead dog, 'tossed ... into the ground so that the rest of us don't have to live with the stink' (p. 83).

In the event, his assault on Muis forces her into abjection but not appeasement, and there is then a shift away from the predominant dog imagery. When he arrives at their camp, Muis feels like 'one of the mice Fansie catches and keeps in a box' (Campbell 2013:63). When Miskiet attacks her, she wonders if this is 'how a sheep feels when it has its throat cut?' (p. 63), reinforcing both his earlier anticipation that he will 'cut her throat like a sheep' (p. 25), and Fansie's subsequent description of the attack: 'She was like a sheep after it's been caught and is about to have its throat slit. It just gives up struggling and lets the knife cut open its throat' (p. 73). Miskiet's sheep imagery repeatedly focuses on killing. Besides planning the murder of Muis in these terms, he compares the slaughter of different animals and people and then remarks that the best way to gut a sheep is 'to hold the knife in your fist and cut backwards' (p. 116). Having learned this skill from his 'daddy' (p. 83), he wishes to impart it to his 'son' Fansie in turn: 'I will teach him to slaughter a sheep and tighten a fence' (p. 53).

By contrast, Kapok's relation to sheep is less vicious and more varied; his imagery is appreciative and even celebratory. Sheep-shearing enables him to buy food for the family (Campbell 2013:12), and sheep dockings provide food directly. Fansie describes the meal his mother makes out of sheep's tails:

Mamma has cooked them, still in their wool, in a large pot of boiling water. She fishes one out for me and I slip the meat and bone out of its woollen coat with one squeeze. (pp. 80–81)

Kapok's memory of the sheep's head baked by his first wife overnight in hot coals in a hole in the ground is as luscious: 'Inside, the soft brain was cooked like bone marrow and with a little salt we spread it, lekker hot, on *roosterkoek*. It was the nicest food a hungry man could imagine' (pp. 28–29). Kapok is able to draw on his knowledge of lambing when his two daughters are born. Whereas Muis thinks each time

that she has 'given birth to a frog', Kapok reassures her, 'It's like a lamb ... sometimes you have to clean out the lamb's mouth and make sure it drinks' (p. 22). Working with sheep is a source of masculine pride. Shearing is hard work: four sheep bring in just 'a R2' (p. 133). Before he hurt his leg, he boasts to their children, and he could work 80 a day – 'My record is thirty-five before *brekfes*' (p. 12). Unlike slaughter, it is this skill of shearing he wants to impart to Fansie. Witpop resents this, jealously, because it is a gendered heritage from which she is excluded: 'My pappie ... is always saying things like "My son, help me here please" or "My son, you will learn to shear sheep one day"' (p. 44).

Kapok's attitude to sheep reveals his understanding not only of the animal but also of the economics of the Karoo. Although in the drought farmers never turn their donkeys away from water, many have no water to give, and those who do reserve grazing for their sheep (Campbell 2013:15). After Fansie's dog Rinkhals 'takes' a lamb, Kapok is angry: '*Pasop*', he tells Fansie. 'If the Boere catch him killing their sheep they are going to shoot first and ask questions later' (p. 32). Like Kapok, Fansie too shows some grasp of these priorities: 'There is no water in this veld. Just a bak by the windmill for the sheep' (p. 78). Desperate with hunger, he even imitates the sheep: 'In the afternoon a cold wind wakes me and I think about food again. There is *soutbos* growing near the bak and, like a sheep, I chew leaves' (p. 79).

Campbell's use of animal imagery to characterise the *karretjiemense* emphasises their embodiment and their embodied relation to their environment – their 'transcorporeality' with it. Notably, the environment permeates their habitual smell. When Muis moves in with Miskiet and Jan, she recalls that her father and brother 'smelt of wood smoke and tobacco, sheep and sweat' (Campbell 2013:84). In fact, the stench of the *karretjie* family is stressed repeatedly. Miskiet says their camp 'reeks of donkey shit and stale wood smoke' – a smell 'that glues itself to *karretjiemense*' – and calls them 'stinking human-animals' (p.81). The Home Affairs official who eventually helps them confirms this: 'Their smell is incredible. Strong enough to make a person cough. I am used to unwashed bodies, they face me every day, but this is different, this is straight out the veld' (p. 125).

By contrast with the family, Miskiet is represented as clean-smelling. Initially attracted to Miskiet because of this, Muis is mesmerised by his deodorant, sniffing it repeatedly. Given his attitude to her, however, she begins to feel 'like dirt on his shoe, like a piece of rubbish' (Campbell 2013:86). When he rapes her, his scent nauseates her: 'I can smell his spray and soap. It's his same smell, like bleach mixed with spray from Pep, the one I remember, and it makes my stomach turn over and I want to be sick' (p. 57). And when in the present he attacks her, she notices:

His smell is on my skin. It crawls over me like a tick looking for a place to suck. It's a smell that makes my mouth dry and my stomach *naar*. (p. 74)

Living in this environment has given members of the family an animal-like acuity of smell. 'That's what is so irritating about *karretjiemense*', says Miskiet, ' – they smell you, even when you are a mile away' (Campbell 2013:88). Fansie remarks that, when the family have no money, Kapok will visit bottle stores to 'enjoy the smell ... At times like that Pappie goes nearly mad from the smell of the dop' (p. 135). After they have killed and robbed Miskiet, Kapok buys food. Firstly, he stands in the road, 'sniffing the air like a dog'; then Muis sniffs too: 'it hits me and my stomach squeezes. It is a smell like no other and my mouth begins to water' (p. 131). Fansie's sense of smell is fundamental to his skill as a hunter and tracker: 'He is my watchdog, creeping around our camp, sniffing the air, looking for signs of something wrong', says Kapok (p. 96). Once in town, this sense of smell has to be supplemented by other senses. Prowling for food in the location, Fansie finds an 'aunty' making bread: 'My jackal nose sniffs the air and my jackal stomach starts biting me to tell me it is very hungry' (p. 113). He steals one loaf for his family and runs to the reeds because he knows his family will be by the river. But the air is full of wood smoke and he can't sniff them out. He tries to hear them, amidst the 'shouting voices, barking dogs, running water, cars, crying' and eventually hears 'a night bird call. Feel them. I look for the yellow from their fire. And then, at last, I see it and I hear Rinkhals barking' (pp. 119–120). In tune with his environment, he uses all his senses to track his family.

Campbell's use of animal imagery thus characterises the individual *karretjiemense*; emphasises their 'interchanges and interconnections' with the 'more-than-human'; and shows them to be materially, conceptually and sensually entangled with the desert environment and the animals in it. Of all the animals in the novel, although, it is the donkeys, and the family's changing relation with them, that best reflects the impact of these networks on their lives. Of all the animals, donkeys are referred to most frequently in the novel (a text search reveals 97 instances). The singular form of the word usually is coupled with 'cart'. While the Afrikaans '*karretjie*' names only the cart, the English 'donkey cart' insists on the significance of the draught animal in providing the family with transport and hence defining their way of life. Later in the novel, we find 'donkey money' (Campbell 2013:94), when they have been sold, and then 'donkey-gun' (p. 104) for the weapon Kapok buys with the money from their sale.

The first mention of donkeys in the novel is made by Miskiet, who knows their noise will set the dogs barking when the family return to Leeu Gamka. Mostly, although, they are a silent presence in the life of the family. The most striking aspect of their representation, in consequence, is their movement, which is interwoven with the movement of their '*mense*'. Miskiet observes how Fansie walks next to the *karretjie*, 'never losing step with the donkeys' (Campbell 2013:10). The donkeys set the pace that the boy follows. Conversely, when the family escapes from Miskiet's attack, they have to be driven. Fansie remarks: 'It's dark and these donkeys are very cross that they can't sleep so we are running with them to keep them moving. We have to keep running'

(p. 73). To agree to this flight, Kapok has had to overcome his awareness that 'Pantoffel and Rinnik are just ribs with no strength to pull the *karretjie*' (p. 29). While the children encourage them verbally, Kapok beats them relentlessly to keep them moving. Miskiet sees that they are 'running now. Kapok's *sjambok* comes down on the donkeys, whipping them on into the night' (p. 87). When Muis wakes up in the cart, the donkeys slow to a walk 'and their clip-clop matches the thump-thump of my heart' (p. 89). But after a brief halt, the whipping resumes, and then, the 'whistle of the *sjambok* on the donkeys' backs is the song of the night' (p. 89).

The donkeys do not always have to be forced to move. Muis has, the day before, reminded Kapok of the occasion they ran away – 'all the way to the Beaufort West road' (Campbell 2013:75). On another occasion the donkeys were stolen during the night, and, Muis recalls:

[W]hen the police came to call us they were running in the main street and we had to go fetch them. It took us a long time to tame the animals after that. (p. 133)

These two instances reveal the donkeys' independence of spirit. For the most part, although, they are co-operative and biddable. When Kapok is drunk, he cannot inspan the donkeys because his 'fingers don't want to work' but Fansie is able, with a few words ('*Kom, kom!*', '*Staan!*', '*Skuif!*'), to push Pantoffel into position with his knee, and back both donkeys into the *karretjie*. 'He is good with donkeys and they listen to him', Kapok acknowledges (p. 64). When sober Kapok himself handles the donkeys with skill and care. Recalling his earlier life with Mina, his first wife, he remembers proudly how he was able to plough Ou Baas Steyn's lucerne lands for him, using the donkeys he had then, to the incredulity of the farmer.

Although the agency of the donkeys is subordinated to the needs of the family, they are in general co-operative because they are treated with care and consideration. In the face of starvation Witpop thinks at one point of killing and eating them, but reminds herself 'Pappie would die before he let us eat his donkeys' (Campbell 2013:35). Starving along with the family, they share what little food there is to eat. They watch Muis stir the pot or knead bread, and when she stews the bony rabbit Fansie catches they are dished a bowl each: 'Starving donkeys eat our meat, crunching the bones between their teeth like two dogs' (p. 15). Kapok notes how hunger unites human and animal: 'We are all slowly starving, Mamma, Pappie, children, dog and donkeys. All of us, always so hungry' (p. 29). When the family stops moving, Kapok's immediate concern is to find them water, remembering how, in the past, 'the springs in our secret places always had a little bubble of water I could dig out to make a drinking place for the donkeys' (p. 29). And when they stop at Baas Johan's farm, he also ensures that the donkeys don't drink too much, telling Fansie to 'watch for their stomachs' (p. 76).

The night's whipping on their flight to Oudtshoorn of course has dire consequences. When they finally stop Rinnik's back is raw, and Pantoffel collapses, 'her sides heaving, her mouth

and nose covered in foam, her hooves bleeding' (Campbell 2013:90). Muis and Kapok have different reactions. Muis calls the donkeys 'stupid' and 'useless', and reproaches Pantoffel: 'Get up, you stupid donkey. "*Staan op!*" I scream from my seat on the karretjie' (p. 90). Kapok, by contrast, feels shame and sorrow: 'We have run them too hard ... Your fear has killed our donkeys' (p. 90). Tending Pantoffel's wounds, he mumbles over and over to himself, 'I have killed my donkeys, I have killed my donkeys' (p. 90). The children pour water over the cuts on Rinnik's back and after cleaning their wounds Kapok finds aloe to help them heal (p. 90).

The consideration with which the donkeys are treated explains their resilience. After sleeping, the family are woken by Fansie to find Pantoffel has, heroically, revived she:

[H]as shrugged off her blanket of reeds and is up, making her way to us and Rinnik. She limps, but Kapok and Fansie meet her and lead her to the water where she walks in to drink. (Campbell 2013:91)

Yet this resilience cannot protect them from their fate. Kapok welcomes Pantoffel's recovery as good news but resolves to sell the donkeys, because they are starving, and because he is tired of their words, their feet, their sores and their hunger. 'I am tired of the sjambok and of them falling down', he says (p. 97). Their suffering has become unendurable to him, and he must end it. After he has sold them, however, he reproaches himself: 'Pantoffel came a long way with me and in the end I beat her until she fell down and then I sold her for a gun' (p. 104).

Kapok's phrase 'came a long way with me' (p. 104) is both literal and metaphoric. As well as their movement shaping the movement of the family, the donkeys have been an integral part of all their lives. When Muis describes hiding her children from a farmer who has chased them off the land, as Kapok has done earlier she concatenates human and animal: 'He thinks it's only me and Kapok and the donkeys'. And this concatenation features in her bemusement at Miskiet's obsession with her: 'Why does he bother with someone like me? I am not important. I am nothing. I can't read, I don't have money, I just walk this way and that way across the Great Karoo with my children, a sick man, two *skraal* donkeys and a dog' (Campbell 2013:62–63). The presence of the donkeys is reflected even in the children's imaginative lives. When his parents get drunk, Fansie protects his sisters, the tools, and the donkeys by hiding them. To distract his sisters from their distress, he makes a game of building 'houses' out of little stones, and teases Witpop to make a room inside it for the donkeys. 'Donkeys don't sleep inside, they will *kak* everywhere,' she rejoins, and they laugh their heads odd, 'thinking of Pantoffel and Rinnik in their own room' (Campbell 2013:59–60).

On a particularly desperate occasion, Kapok considers abandoning the family: 'Sometimes I just want to leave them all sitting at the side of the *blerrie* road and take my donkeys and go. Maybe then I can have some rest' (Campbell 2013:27). Yet he also recognises the limitations of the companionship of the donkeys. After his first wife died, he says, 'It wasn't the

same on the karretjie. There is no joy in lighting a fire for one person at night, making coffee and skinning a rabbit with only donkeys to talk to' (p. 27). It is partly for this reason that he invites Muis to join him on the donkey cart. 'It's been a hard life on the vlaktes', he acknowledges, 'but I have seen her laugh and most of the time she has peace in her eyes' (p. 27). Effectively, it is the donkeys and the donkey cart that anchor the family's life in the desert and give the family the resilience to endure.

The loss of the donkeys, therefore, impacts their lives substantially. Kapok is resolutely glad he is rid of them yet reflects, as they walk: 'On and on. The grey backs of Pantoffel and Rinnik come into my mind. My hands move reins that are not there' (Campbell 2013:103). His sense of their ghost-like presence is reflected in this automatic, autonomous motion. The loss of the donkeys hits Fansie hard. He weeps but nobody notices because all of them have their heads down. Like her father, Witpop feels their absent presence: 'The donkeys are gone but I hear clip-clop, clip-clop behind me and keep looking back to see where they are. No. I shake my head. No donkeys. No karretjie' (p. 100). And she wonders, 'Really, what are we going to do? When we go back will we still walk in the veld?' (p. 101). Witpop sees how her brother moves differently: 'It's not *lekker* to see Fansie walking when he always runs' and wonders, 'Is he going to slow down forever, now that Pantoffel and Rinnik and the karretjie are gone?' (p. 100). The note on which the chapter ends is ominous: 'Again I hear clip-clop, clip-clop and I look back for Fansie and the donkeys but there is nothing there. And then I see that Fansie has gone' (p. 102).

His disappearance here prefigures the ending of the novel. Having acquired papers and formal identities, and stripped of their resilience to survive in the desert, the family leave Oudtshoorn to return to Leeu Gamka and make a new life. With no donkeys or donkey cart, Muis' plans for the future are optimistic: she envisages getting a domestic job; putting the children in school; and renting a space in a yard to 'make a proper *hok*' (Campbell 2013:130). But the renunciation of the nomadic life in the desert comes at the cost of family unity. They leave without Fansie, who has joined a gang of mafelletjies who make their living robbing drunks. Although Muis, like Witpop, is confident that Fansie will rejoin them, her assertions 'He will come. He always does' (p. 142) strike hollow, and the note on which the novel ends is plaintive and unresolved. It is not clear if Fansie will leave his new life in the town to join the family who are now no longer *karretjiemense*.

The ending of the novel thus enacts Isak Louw's remark, '*Karretjiemense is dood, hulle bestaan nie meer nie*' (2:07–2:20). While the family have gained the 'faces' of the novel's title, they have sacrificed their lives on the karretjie to do so. Surviving the drought and the desert and evading their pursuer Miskiet required immense resilience – resilience that developed out of transcorporeal integration with their desert environment. Campbell demonstrates this transcorporeality through naming, through animal imagery, through smell and through movement. Pushed to the brink, however, the

family are forced to leave the desert and to abandon their connection to it; their story as *karretjiemense* becomes history that only the desert now might tell.

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