Looking for Maria, her sisters, daughters and sons

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In *Native life in South Africa* Sol Plaatje makes reference to Maria, a widow and the mother of a 16-year-old daughter, and two sons aged 14 and three respectively. Maria is ordered to leave the home where she and her husband lived while working on a Dutchman’s farm, plough-sharing the land until her husband’s death. Following his death Maria continued the contract and managed to earn a fair living, thanks to her son and daughter helping her to herd the cattle, amongst others. During the harvest season they hired help to till the fields, while they themselves tended and reaped the harvest, delivering 50 per cent of the produce to the landowner.

In both Sol Plaatje and RW Msimang’s narratives of the events of the cold winter of 1913 Maria has no last name – she is an unfortunate widow who, with the advent of the 1913 *Natives Land Act*, finds herself confronted with an abrupt end to the way of life which had sustained her and her children. The farmer, who had benefitted from the labour of her household, offers her the option of indenturing her children to him and disposing of her stock. When Maria finds this unacceptable, the landlord orders her to clear out immediately. He is also said to have advised her to ‘find another man before you reach your next place of abode as the law will not allow you to stay until you have a man to work for the Baas’ (Plaatje 1982, 82). Plaatje continues: ‘Having given her (this) counsel the landlord is said to have set fire to Maria’s thatched cottage and as the southeaster blew the smoke of her burning home towards the northwest, Maria with her bedclothes on her head, and on the heads of her son and daughter, and carrying her three-year-old son tied on her back, walked off from the farm, driving her cows before her’ (ibid.). Plaatje remarks that there has been no news on the plight of Maria and her family since they left the farm in the Hoopstad District in June 1913. They joined the huge exodus of hapless families trekking...
Looking for Maria, her sisters, daughters and sons from farm to farm, trying to find homes to settle with their children and their livestock or, alternatively, trying to reach Lesotho or Swaziland where the Act did not apply, only to lose their livestock along the way, and sometimes also children who could not be buried on the land they travelled across, except in stealth, with no markers for the graves. A policeman whom Plaatje and his colleagues met along the way remarked that ‘if ever there was a fool’s errand it is that of a Kaffir trying to find a new home for his stock and family just now’ (ibid, 70). And so we part with Maria, on a cold day in June, when she leaves the place which had been her home, and is advised that she has no value to anyone – except perhaps if she can find a man along the way who would marry her, so she can become a worthwhile proposition for some farmer. Failing that, she is doomed.

As Bethuel Setai (1998, 107) points out, ‘the wandering Africans really had nowhere to go. Some went to the reserves, areas that were not designed to accommodate them. The reserves were too small and overcrowded. They were also barren and generally unproductive. Some went to the locations, but these were small and did not have ploughing or grazing lands. Some went to the Crown Lands, however this too was risky.’ As one African commented around this time (in Setai 1998, 107): ‘We are in a fix where to go, for if we went to one of the government lands, any white man seeing a number of natives squatting on a government farm without a master will buy the farm – not for its beauty or fertility but for the number of Kaffirs it has.’

Countless narratives of endless wandering and broken families permeate Sol Plaatje and RW Msimang’s accounts of the impact of the Natives Land Act of 1913. For instance, an old man in the Hoopstad District, Mr. Kgabale, whom Plaatje visited, was evicted from the farm he and his family had worked on. According to Plaatje and Msimang’s accounts, the farmer visited Kgabale in mid-June 1913 to cancel their verbal land tenancy contract, and to turn the family into unpaid servants in exchange for the privilege of being able to live in the farm. Realising that Kgabale was old, the farmer demanded that he ask his two sons to return from Johannesburg, so they could work on the farm. The farmer further declared that if the sons failed to return in time, Kgabale, his wife and daughters would have to leave. He gave Kgabale ten days to bring his sons home. As Plaatje (1982, 80) writes:

The poor man wandered from place to place, trying to find someone who could write, so to dictate a letter to his sons telling them what had happened. The week expired before they could get a response from Johannesburg. The landlord, in a very abusive mood, again demanded the instant arrival of his sons from Johannesburg to commence work at the farmhouse the very next morning. Kgabale spent the whole night praying that at least one of his sons would come back. By daybreak the next day no answer had arrived and the Dutchman came and set fire to the old man’s house, and ordered them then and there to quit the farm. It was a sight to see the feeble old man, his wife and his daughters driven from a place which they had regarded as their home.

Plaatje believes the family then headed in the direction of Klerksdorp. When one of the sons arrived a week later he found his home in ruins, and continued in the direction of Klerksdorp, searching for them.
Setai (1998, 107) describes the Land Act as ‘a piece of legislation that abused the privilege of power, legitimized exploitation and enslavement and furthered the dependence on government’. It had the effect of making Africans both slaves and pariahs in South Africa.

They were required to give their labour free, to use their own capital, to plough the land of the farmer, and to go out and look for money so they could pay the Boer for graciously allowing them to work for him. They were able to keep only a small portion of the money. They could be evicted for being ill, old, no longer productive, or independent thinkers (ibid, 103).

Setai could have added women to that list.

The history I learnt at school taught me very little about the Land Act, only that it allocated 13 per cent of the land to black people, and 87 per cent to white people. As subsequent commissions and studies revealed, even those ‘facts’ were questionable. The empirical evidence disputes the history I was taught, namely that ‘black people were lazy’; that they failed dismally at farming; and that foolish women like Nonqawuse were responsible for the dire position black people found themselves in. Later readings, beyond formal schooling, opened my eyes to different histories (and herstories). The story of a proud but vanquished people. I discovered Kas Maine in Van Onselen’s seminal work entitled The seed is mine and, through the work of Colin Bundy, was introduced to a successful African peasantry which had systematically been broken, disenfranchised and impoverished.

I found Maria in RW Msimang’s and Sol Plaatje’s work. I found that Sir George Grey was complicit in the so-called Nonqawuse cattle-killing tragedy. I found that there were also other efforts at alienating Africans from their livestock, including through thievery – as evidenced by the September 1913 account of Plaatje’s visit to Ladybrand where a case was in progress of a native couple who had been evicted and then waylaid, ambushed and murdered by Dutchmen who stole their livestock, as well as the castration of bulls at the behest of native reserves authorities, referenced by Mrs. Dumani of Sakkiedorp in her account to Phyllis Ntantala Jordan. On the eve of the 100th anniversary of the Natives Land Act, in December 2012, I revisit the treasures penned by Plaatje, Msimang, Setai, Ntantala Jordan and others, to excavate in their accounts the impact of the Act and its effects on the lives of women and men in South Africa. These texts are important resources, and are critical if what has been done in the past, is to be undone in the present and in the future.

The texts indicate to us how much of what is called tradition and/or culture, are in fact, colonial impositions implemented through the native reserves system, and thus not ‘culture’ or ‘tradition’ at all. In this regard it is instructive to study a precursor to the Natives Land Act, passed in 1894 and promulgated as the Glen Grey Act, whose purpose was to create a land shortage for Africans. As Setai (1998, 109) writes: ‘The Act provided the necessary authority to achieve this purpose by limiting the amount of land an individual African could own and by restricting the inheritance of land to the eldest son only.’ The Act also restricted the authority of chiefs to local matters, and
Looking for Maria, her sisters, daughters and sons removed their power to make decisions over land, instead transferring the power to local magistrates. Duly empowered, the magistrates abolished the traditional system of communal land-holding and replaced it with a system based on individual land tenure.

Being gentlemen, Plaatje and RW Msimang found it difficult to write on some of the gendered aspects of the *Natives Land Act* – in particular, the high incidence of rape. They hint at high levels of this scourge without expressly naming it, leaving only enough indications to point to its pervasiveness as part of the ‘hardships’ engendered by the Act. Rape is simply referred to as an outrage – an outrage visited upon women and children. Plaatje (1982, 93) writes: ‘Several white men are at present undergoing long terms of imprisonment inflicted by the Orange Free State Circuit Courts for criminality outraging colored women whom the pass laws had placed in the hollow hands of these ruffians. Still many mothers are smothering evidence of similar outrages upon innocent daughters.’ Rape does not comprise the only gendered aspect of the *Natives Land Act* – Plaatje documents the ‘anomaly’ of the special permission women had to obtain in order to live in the Free State, and the additional fee they had to pay for a fresh pass every month. He is scandalised by the fact that class no longer provided a shield for the wives of ministers of religion or the families of ‘respectable natives’. He writes (ibid, 93): ‘Hence whereas the pass regulations were never enforced by the Boers against clergymen’s wives or against the families of respectable native inhabitants, now she has not only to produce a pass on demand, but like every other woman of colour, she has to pay a shilling for a fresh pass at the end of the month …’ Plaatje points to the fact that if he were to settle in the ‘Free’ State he could apply for and obtain letters of exemption from the ordinary pass laws, yet if his wife ‘were to go to reside in the “Free” State with her daughters, all of them would be forced to carry passes on their persons, and be called upon to ransack their skirt pockets at anytime in the public streets at the behest of a male policeman’ (ibid, 93).

Chapter 7 of *Native life in South Africa* is entitled ‘The persecution of colored women in the Orange Free State. Here, Plaatje (ibid, 92) illustrates that from the very beginning, the *Natives Land Act* of 1913 had gendered dimensions: ‘When the “Free” State’s ex-Republicans made use of the South African constitution to ruin the colored population they should at least have confined their persecution to the male portion of the blacks … and have left the women and children alone.’ But that was not to be. Instead, as the evidence presented by Plaatje on incidents in the Free State shows, attempts by women’s representatives to bring their situation to the attention of the authorities went unheeded, until ultimately women took matters into their own hands and staged a series of marches, starting with a march by 600 women in July 1913, in Bloemfontein, followed by marches in Jagersfontein, 800 women marching in Winberg and so forth. Women being arrested during these marches resulted in a crisis, as there was not sufficient space in jail to keep them incarcerated, yet the women held fast, refusing to pay fines ranging from 10 shillings to 3 pounds, ‘and they had resolved to carry no more passes, much less to pay a shilling, each month per capita, for passes’ (ibid, 85).

As secretary of the African Native Congress, Plaatje wrote to the incoming head of Native Affairs, General Botha, informing him at the time that there were more than
200 women in incarceration. The situation of women in South Africa had deteriorated drastically, as Plaatje (ibid, 97) wrote: ‘African women (whether with or without her parents or husband) were effectively exiled from the Republic, and were restricted only to the native reserves’ and in (1998, 93) he also wrote ‘no native woman … can reside within a municipality unless she can produce a permit showing that she is a servant within the employ of a white person, this permit being signed by the town clerk.’

Plaatje also writes on the conditions under which African women were held in incarceration – they had to be transported from their home towns to small towns where prison accommodation could be found for them – Kroonstad, for instance, where Plaatje and others visited women in jail:

A severe shock burst upon us, inside the prison walls, when the matron withdrew the barriers and the emaciated figures of ladies and young girls of our acquaintance filed out and greeted us. It was an exceptionally cold week, and our hearts bled to see young women of Bloemfontein, who had spent all their lives in the capital and never knew what it was to walk without their socks, walking the chilly cemented floors and the cold and sharp pebbles without boots and shoes which had been taken off, they told us, and they told us, they were throughout the winter, forced to perform hard labour barefooted. … Tears rolled down our cheeks when we saw the cracks on their bare feet, the swellings and chronic chilblains, … it was torture to us to learn of the kind of punishment to which they were subjected and the nature of work they were called on to perform … To our surprise however, they vowed never to buy passes, even if they had to come back (ibid, 97).

Narrow interpretations of the impact of the 1913 Natives Land Act limit the discussion to a question of land dispossession, and seek to rectify the situation through programmes of land redistribution and land restitution. Such attempts have been spectacularly unsuccessful and slow in pace in the case of South Africa, and have, for that reason, met with much criticism. The criticism, however, does not begin to address the core issues in relation to the Land Act. The Act is not merely about who had land and who did not, and who should/should not therefore be compensated for land. The Act is at the core of the pervasive inequalities that characterise South African society today, both at the level of gender and race. It is responsible for the erosion of a way of life for the majority of South Africans, the erosion of community and social values, broken families and the willful targeting of African women. It is also responsible for the erosion of arable land in areas reserved for African people, through overcrowding in these areas.

I argue that these issues need to be addressed, as the nation revisits the 1913 Natives Land Act and seeks to redress its negative impacts. Among the issues that cannot be ignored in a rigorous review of the impact of the Act are the following:

- Land ownership might not be the only way (or indeed a way) of addressing the land question in South Africa. Sam Motsuenyane points out, in A testament of hope, that his family (i.e. his father’s brothers) were among the first Africans to buy their own farms in the Lichtenburg and Potchefstroom areas. ‘This was around 1903 at a time when some Africans thought that we were a very stupid family to buy “God’s own
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Land”. Traditionally … land was regarded as a gift from God to the people and not to individuals. Individual ownership was regarded as selfish … According to them even the whites who claimed that the land was theirs were wrong’ (2011, 1).

- As a result of the Land Act, a peoples’ way of life was totally eroded, consequently hunger and food insecurity became the norm. From Plaatje’s account to that of Ntantala Jordan, I found narratives of people who previously had cows and milk in abundance, milk which they sometimes sold to others, now lamenting having to purchase small quantities of milk at what they regarded as exorbitant prices, and bemoaning the fact that in the future their children would not know where milk came from.

- Vagrancy and migrant labour became the norm, with husbands and young men forced into cheap labour in the cities through the imposition of taxes, and women being ‘exiled’ in the reserves. As Setai (1998, 107) argues, (African) poverty was manufactured in South Africa, with white capital’s collusion and in its interests. LB Lee-Warden (1957, 48), wrote in the case of the Western Cape:

  > In 1894 the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, Cecil Rhodes, devised a plan for obtaining labour for the diamond mines and for the white farmers. He introduced in that year taxing the male African population … It would be correct to say that the Africans in South Africa have contributed more than their share to the prosperity of the State! South Africa is today one of the wealthiest countries in the world, while the African population has remained poverty stricken, semi literate and chained hand and foot by legislative enactments.

- Migrancy continues to have an overwhelming impact on gender relations and in the lives of women and men in South Africa specifically, and southern Africa in general.

  The burden that falls upon the women who are thus left behind is indescribable. They must till and care for the land – usually without any help- and also keep their homes in good repair. The women are quite unable to earn the money required to maintain themselves and their children, ….Occasionally the woman receives money from her husband, but more often than not his wages are so meager and his job so precarious that few women in the Reserves know anything but poverty (ibid, 50).

- Interestingly, even as it is generally agreed that women living in rural areas (the former reserves) bore the brunt of apartheid brutality and continue to be disproportionately represented amongst the poor, very little targeted action has been directed at redressing their situation. These policy silences and omissions mean that for many women today the situation is unchanged. In 2012 the country bore witness as many women became widows, when 34 miners were killed one cold August day in Marikana while protesting over meager wages and appalling living conditions. The failure to change colonial and apartheid working conditions has continued to subsidise capital in post-apartheid South Africa.
Even though they were left behind to till the land and practise subsistence farming to the extent that there was arable land to work on, women have been the biggest losers where land reform is concerned. According to a Commission on Gender Equality’s (CGE) report entitled *A gender analysis of the Land Reform Policy* only 13 per cent of women have been beneficiaries of the post-1994 Land Reform Programme in South Africa, i.e. men comprise over 87 per cent of the beneficiaries (figures yet to be verified by the CGE). This is inconsistent with South Africa’s constitutional obligation to instill gender equality.

The *Natives Land Act* was only amongst the first in a slew of legislation aimed at dispossessing and disenfranchising African people in South Africa. Phyllis Ntantala Jordan, in her narrative entitled *An African tragedy*, writing four decades after Plaatje and Msimang’s narratives mentioned above, points to the systematic humiliation, dispossession and impoverishment of a people in other regions of the country (particularly in the Western Cape) from 1936–1956. Ntantala Jordan (1957, 59) writes: ‘It is the sad story of a whole people, 8,535,000 souls – landless, homeless, destitute, a people who have been ruthlessly uprooted from the country but not allowed to develop roots in the towns; victims of a vicious worked out system to render them homeless, property less and poor so that they can be pushed to the labour market to still the economic cries of the industrial age.’ The result is the ever-wandering people Plaatje and Setai refer to; nomads between two worlds, each world as desolate as the next. According to the figures of the 1951 census (Tomlinson Report, in Ntantala Jordan 1957, 59) the population constantly moving between town and country numbered 569 000 a year and consisted of 503 000 males and 66 000 women – two thirds of whom were between 20 and 39 years of age, with nearly 94 per cent of them under the age of 50,

hoping to escape misery in the reserves where they crowd themselves with the relatives and friends in the city slums, in the ‘pondokkie’ or the shanty towns sprawling round the big cities. Johannesburg has its share of these slums … Alexandra Township … Orlando Shelters … And Cape Town has its Windermere … It has its Bouvlei, Cooks Bush, Vrygrond, Eureka Estate, Sakkiesdorp … Durban has its Cato Manor; Port Elizabeth has its Korsten; East London has its East and West Bank locations – none of them fit for human habitation … There are no amenities even of the barest kind … In all of them life is insecure … (Ntantala Jordan 1957, 60).

Many of the conditions Ntantala Jordan describes in the squatter camps of 1954 still obtain in present-day South Africa. For instance, she writes:

During the winter of 1954 the whole of Cooks Bush was flooded neck-high and most of the pondokkies were submerged, and nearly 600 people rescued from the floods lost everything they had. […] A fire breaking out in these iron and paper shacks spreads so quickly to the others, and fanned by the South Easter, the flames leap from structure to structure so easily that often fifty to sixty of these structures are eaten up by flames within a few minutes and hundreds of people rendered homeless with everything lost. Many a man, a woman, and child has been burnt in these fires and many a savings of
many years of hard toil have been lost in these fires and many a hard-earned wardrobe has been burnt to ashes in these fires (ibid, 62).

Similar narratives appear regularly in present-day newspapers, more than six decades later.

**The testimony of Mrs Dumani**

Phyllis Ntantala Jordan gives voice to one of Maria’s sisters – Mrs. Dumani, who lived in Sakkiesdorp in 1954. According to Mrs. Dumani, Mr. Dumani was her second husband; her first had been Mr. Sahluko, who died in Cape Town in 1949. Mrs. Dumani was 19 when she married her first husband in 1932; both of them came from Engcobo in the Transkei. At the time her husband was working in Cape Town, but their hope was that some day they would have a piece of land of their own, and remain in the reserves. In 1954, with hindsight, she tells Ntantala: ‘It was a silly hope’ (ibid, 63). In her own words she explains:

Although I was pregnant and my husband and I would have loved to be together when our first child was born, he was forced to leave me six months after our marriage to come and seek work at Cape Town. The child was born 5 months later – a boy. But his father never saw him, for the child died at the age of fifteen months before his father could afford to join us again. It was not until the end of 1935 that my husband could come home – the years 1933 and 1934 were very bad years – there was drought in the reserves, the stock had died, very little had been reaped from the fields and the money he sent home was used for buying food. So bad was the situation that in all two years he managed to buy only two beasts. Towards the end of 1936 I got my second baby – another boy. This baby my husband saw because in spite of our difficulties he was determined to stay with me until the child was born. He left for the city again when the baby was three months. He never saw him again. The baby died at the end of ten months. My husband’s intention when he left in 1937 was to remain in town for only two years and then to return to the reserves for good and build our own home. But he lost his job – a good job that paid him 8 pounds a month – and after hunting for a job for 3 months he managed to get 6 pounds a month job as a cleaner.

So in 1938 we decided that I should join him in town. We shared a room with two other couples – also from Engcobo – in Napier Street, and for the room we paid 1 pound per family per month. Three couples in one room! Just like animals, no privacy at all! I got a job as a cook shortly after my arrival and this brought in another 6 pounds so between the two of us we had 12 pounds per month. But in 1940 I got pregnant and did not go back to work until my baby daughter was 2 years old. I had to go back to work, but with a baby on my back there was no hope of finding a job. So I was forced to part with her. I sent her under charge of some friends who happened to be returning ‘home’ to the reserves – to be looked after by her father’s mother. I went into service again, this time getting an extra 10 shillings to my six pounds a month and my husband had also got a better paying job at one of the bazaars at three pounds a week. Putting 1945 as our deadline for returning to the reserves we saved all we could, putting away in the Post
Office every penny of my wages and trying to make do with my husband’s 3 pounds a week; my husband walking to his work in the Bazaar in town and I coming out to the room once or twice a week, and sending 3 pounds every two months for the upkeep of the child in the reserves.

So in April 1945, we packed and left for the reserves for good – or so we thought (ibid, 64).

Another fool’s errand, a couple with their life savings setting off to the native reserves to start a new life together, hoping to live as a family with their daughter. The search for land in the reserves was in vain – no allotments were to be had, and Mrs. Dumani relates her husband’s futile attempts at trying to secure land.

Meanwhile the drought was getting worse and worse – there hadn’t been any milk now for five years since the castration of the bulls from 1939–1940, the field crop had been poor and the stock had died of the thirst and hunger – one of our cows had died in the winter of 1946 after calving – the money we had brought with us was fast being spent (ibid, 64).

And so it was that once again Mrs Sahluko found herself left behind in the reserves in February 1947. Her husband returned to Cape Town, once again to eke out a living in the city. She says:

I never saw him again. He spent most of 1947 in and out of hospital and in 1948 he died of TB here in Cape Town. I could not even come down for the funeral – I had no money for the journey. It was only months later that I could manage to come down, leaving my home and my child. I never saw my daughter again. She died in 1951 at the age of eleven. So my last link with my late husband was gone. There was nothing left of what I had with him (ibid, 65).

So back to town I came and in 1952 I met and married Mr. Dumani (ibid, 65).

Mrs. Dumani’s narrative of life with Mr. Dumani is instructive of the difficulties experienced by those who provided labour in the towns.

We stayed as subtenants in a room in Kensington paying 3 pounds a month. […] In 1953 we were ejected from this room for failure to pay rent. The chief tenant whom we paid 3 pounds a month never paid a penny to the landlord for 9 months … To Cooks Bush we moved, then built our own shack in March 1953. We lost this with everything we had in a fire that broke out one night in November. We soon put up new ones – these were flooded out in the winter floods of 1954 when the water rose neckhigh and our pondokkies were like boats in an ocean of water. There again we lost everything except the clothes we stood in and a blanket each. This time it was really hard as we had not recovered from the fire of the previous year. So, rather than go to Nyanga, we decided to look for a place – dry and solid even if it meant paying 3 pounds for rent, we managed to get this place in Tiervlei where we shared a house with a colored family. […] Here again we could not stay – the Inspectors came; they wanted ‘no natives among colored
Looking for Maria, her sisters, daughters and sons. We had to go to the emergency camp in Nyanga or I would have to go back to the reserves. So one wet morning we were brought here by lorry, dumped in the bush and had to do what we could to provide shelter for ourselves and our possessions. On occasions like this I am glad that I have no children. [...] This is another pondokkie land and we will be smoked out of this place one day as we used to be smoked out of Cooks’ Bush. The 40 pounds we used in the building of this place is about all the savings we had; transport is bad, it costs so much. Return to the reserves they say. What is there to go back to? There is nothing to go back to (ibid, 66).

As Ntantala points out, Mrs. Dumani’s story is typical of many of those people who are forever moving up and down between town and country, every day of every month and every year. The reserves are eroded bare and cannot provide any livelihood for the people. [...] There is not enough land for those who would like to stay in the land as peasants. ... the reserves were never meant to provide the African with land from which to squeeze out a livelihood ... so that the people will be forced out into the labour market, to the mines and farms where they will be herded together in camps, compounds and locations, where each white industrialist, farmer and housewife will be allocated his or her own share of hands. In the towns only their labour is wanted – themselves not (ibid, 67).

Mrs. Dumani’s narrative brings to the fore the impact of the 1913 Land Act on the lives of women, men and children. In Ntantala’s words: ‘The problem of the African, the cause behind this story of the peoples’ agony is LANDLESSNESS: LANDLESSNESS’ (ibid.)

This agony, as reflected in Mrs Dumani’s narrative – of the poverty and landlessness of the African people – is created (Setai 1998; Terreblanche 2002) and sustained through legislation, the Glen Grey Act being the being the model for the 1913 Land Act and subsequent amendments in 1936 and 1951, which represent a deliberate and systematic onslaught on the independence of Africans. It is important to note that between 1890 and 1910 the Cape government launched a massive programme of subsidies, grants and other forms of assistance to promote the commercialisation of white agriculture. According to Terreblanche (2002, 261), ‘[t]he Cape government used a sizable part of the income it received from the gold mining industry to subsidize almost every aspect of white farming, but none of these subsidies were available to African farmers’.

Land and legislation have been powerful weapons through which African people were dispossessed and impoverished in South Africa. The Land Act enabled white farmers in the highveld to change rent tenants to labour tenants, but it took the best part of 50 years before more or less all Africans on white farms were forced into a wage-earning proletariat (Legassick in Terreblanche 2002, 263).

In addition to the legislation it put in place, the state was an active champion for white farmers, it strengthened the economic position of maize farmers by adopting a series of farm acts and paying out large-scale subsidies, mainly financed with the tax revenue from the gold mines, as Terreblanche (2002) points out, the Union government enacted no fewer than 87 bills relating to land between 1910 and 1935. The railway
system was also developed in a way that benefited agriculture at the expense of the rest of the economy. In addition, the Land Bank was established in 1912 to provide white farmers with both short-term loans for crop harvesting and long-term loans for capital improvements. This policy culminated in the *Marketing Act* of 1937, whereby the marketing of the bulk of South Africa’s farm produce was brought under the control of a series of producer-friendly control boards. As Terreblanche (ibid, 262) points out the structural domination of whites over blacks created by the Land Act is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the real wages of African workers in mining and agriculture did not increase between 1910 and 1972. The migrant labour system made it possible for the mining industry to justify average wages below the subsistence level on the grounds that jobs in white areas were merely supplementing African’s basic economic life in the ‘native reserves’.

The African peasantry dwindled from 2.5 million in 1936 to 832 000 in 1946. Many who succeeded as farmers in the late 19th and early 20th century later succumbed due to plague (like the Runderpest of 1896/7) or drought, they had no access to loans and limited transport to goods markets. But in the main, legal restrictions delivered the fatal blow. Many argue that the underdevelopment of African reserves subsidised the development of agrarian, mining and industrial capital in South Africa. As Terreblanche (ibid, 264) asserts:

> By depriving African farmers of much of their land, and ending sharecropping and tenant farming on white owned land … an important agricultural and entrepreneurial tradition and store of indigenous farming knowledge was destroyed. It is difficult to determine the value of this tradition, but it is probably considerable, because it was well adapted to South Africa’s land and labour peculiarities. *If this African agricultural tradition had not been destroyed, but given more or less the same government support (both financially and technologically) given to white farmers, South Africa’s agricultural and economic history would have been different.*

What is the cost of the *Land Act*? The cost lies in its erosion of a peoples’ livelihood and way of life; the death of many along the way; the introduction of landlessness, food insecurity, inequalities (including gender inequalities) as well as high levels of poverty. Can the state, which aggressively manufactured the conditions of poverty and inequality that still characterise South African society, continue to maintain these conditions, 18 years into democracy? The gaping wounds that are the legacy of the *Land Act* erupt occasionally before our eyes in the form of the events at Marikana, strikes by farm-workers in the Western Cape, increasing rates of gender-based violence, and the floods and fires that keep displacing many who live in informal settlements. The current land reform processes are silent on these issues, and will therefore fail to ensure that the crime of 1913 is redressed. The voices of Maria, her daughters, sons and sisters, including Mrs. Dumani, will not be heard.
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References