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Hope in despair: expropriated for political expediency - my family's fading cries for ancestral land

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Hope in despair: Expropriated for political expediency

My family's fading cries for ancestral land

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, 2021.

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Abstract

The signing into law of the South African constitution in 1996 was widely expected to provide redress for communities that suffered land dispossession during white colonial rule, among other imperatives. The Restitution of Land Rights Act of 1994, and especially Section 25 of the constitution, specifically affirmed an individual's right to land restitution. As such, there were great expectations that the Natives Land Act of 1913 and other subsequent legislations on land dispossession would be reversed. As is well documented, land reform in South Africa has been painfully slow and complex. A distinguishing feature of this longform narrative article is that it is told through the voices of a family and community members who share their darkest moments of living and working on white people's farms and their struggle to reclaim their land. The research established that not only is the ideal of land reform in South Africa a monumental failure and disappointment, but that it is a veritable betrayal that can be damaging on affected people whose quest for restorative justice remains elusive. It shows our community's struggle in reclaiming their ancestral land. After almost a quarter of a century since we lodged our land claim, we have nothing to show for it. This is also a family story about the travails of lifting ourselves out of the morass of poverty and deprivation, wrought by land dispossession and forced removals. Interviews with white farmers whose properties are under the land claims show that land reform can be a polarising issue that threatens national unity, if not dealt with prudently, expeditiously and judiciously. This research project consists of two parts, a longform narrative and a scholarly piece that underpins it.

Declaration:

I declare that this longform narrative research article is my original and unaided work. It is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master's in Journalism and Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university. The copyright thereof resides with the University of the Witwatersrand. I have duly and accurately cited all the references used.

.....

Lebogang Seale

Signature: _____

Date: 24/06/2021

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I also want to express my profound gratitude to my parents, Motlhatlego Wellington Seale and Puledi Mamodjadji Seale, as well as my relatives and elders in our community who availed themselves for interviews. This research project would not have been possible without their insightful knowledge of our family's life history. Many thanks to the commercial farmers, Eugene 'Jupie' Pohl, Mauritz Jean 'Tickie' Pohl, the late George Short and Tommie van Zyl of ZZ2 for agreeing to be interviewed. Their views offered an interesting perspective about South Africa's land reform debacle.

My siblings Teddy and Nancy were helpful in pointing out to certain leads in the family history. Special thanks to my wife Mpho who was supportive and patient throughout my years of study and when I travelled far away from home searching for information and materials relevant to this project. Lastly, I dedicate this work to my children, Kholofelo, Kgomotšo, Tumelo and Kopano. I hope that it will inspire them to understand that with hard work and perseverance, nothing is unattainable.

Caught up in the land claim storm

The scorching sun returned with a vengeance, drying up the rare raindrops of the early afternoon. Here and there, far and near, a few residents huddled under tree branches hanging low over rickety fences. A lone goat or two rummaged through threadbare patches of grass on the edge of the streets. Barring these, the streets were deserted, and an ominous silence descended over Mohlabaneng village on the outskirts of Modjadjiskloof (formerly Duiwelskloof) in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The sun stood still, watching every movement.

It was a Saturday afternoon in November 2015, when the days are longer and hotter. You feel that it cannot get worse than here, but the sweltering heatwave gets harsher as you trek to the farthest north in the lower escarpment. As I approached the street leading to my parents' home, a whirlwind started swirling ferociously, lashing houses with thick dust and all manner of fragments. For a moment, it stopped right in my parents' yard and danced around. Then it moved away with aggressive force.

The dust had scarcely settled when my father, Motlhatlego Wellington Seale, came out of the house and sat under a tree. He cast a forlorn figure and was in a contemplative mood. "Your mother hasn't been seen since this morning. I've been asking around and no one can say with any certainty where she is," he muttered, rubbing his scalp that gleamed under the African sun.



Figure 1. Motlhatlego Wellington Seale
(Photo: The Author)

Anxiety still etched into every line of his eyes; father ushered me to the living room. We had just settled down when the roaring sound of cars filled the air. And then the silence returned, followed by a soft thud of doors closing. It was my brother Teddy Seale and sister Nancy Seale (both younger to me), alighting from their cars. Teddy, Nancy and I seldom take the 450km jaunt from Gauteng to our home village, unless for special occasions or during the festive seasons.

Mohlabaneng is a sprawling village in Bolobedu, a tribe that forms part of the Bapedi, or Northern Sotho speaking people in Limpopo Province. (Mohlabaneng is marked B on the map below. Also, see appendix 8 on page 130). Until the advent of democracy in 1994, the province consisted of three homelands: Lebowa (for the Pedi people), Gazankulu (Shangaan) and Venda (people). These were rural reserves designated by apartheid's architects, which they called bantustans.

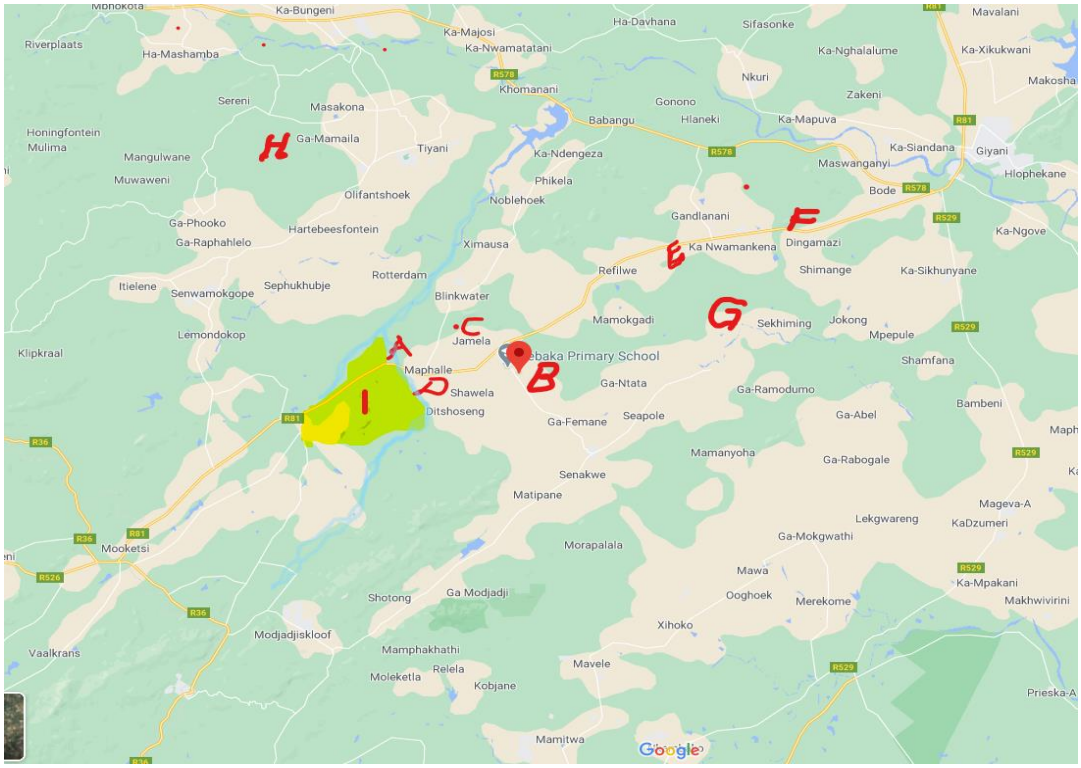


Figure 2. Villages in Bolobedu, Limpopo Province, where the Seale community scattered after they were forced off their land (yellow part marked I (Source: Maphill)

Whenever Teddy, Nancy and I travel to that part of the country, there is a yearning to see our father and mother, Puledi Mmamodjadji Seale. Mother was nicknamed Mabela, which literally means the one who is boiling. True to her name, she was irascible, and could fly at anyone at the slightest provocation. Yet, her benevolence and friendliness were all too apparent.

We had hardly shared pleasantries when we heard a clinking sound. It was the gate opening. "There she is!" father said, peering through the window. A palpable feeling of relief swept across the room. Looking regal in her black garment, her hands calmly clasped together behind her back, mother sauntered into the yard. As she walked into the passageway, I leaned forward on the couch in anticipation. She glanced around the room, her eyes first resting on Nancy at the far corner, then Teddy and finally me. She then proceeded to walk into her bedroom. Quietly.

"Whose funeral was it?" Nancy asked, after a while. Father shrugged his shoulders and raised his hands. Moments later, mother emerged clutching a glossy piece of paper inscribed with a photograph of a stout white man grinning.



Figure 3. 'Kaspaas' Pohl.
(Photo: Family Facebook page)

Below the image was a message in bold letters:

"Montague Marinus (Kaspaas) Pohl"
Birthdate: August 27, 1956
Death: October 31, 2015 (59),
Farm Klipdrift, Mooketsi, Mopani, Limpopo, South Africa (Heart attack)
Place of Burial: Mooketsi, Mopani."

Father shook his head, then tapped me on the shoulder. “Oh, Kaspaas (the Afrikaner farmer’s nickname),” he said, a wry smile spreading across his face.

“So, now that he has followed his father to the grave, you think you can have all their land,” mother charged. A brief silence engulfed the room. We were stunned into silence. My father, my brother, my sister and I.

Once again, our family was caught up in the tensions over the land claim issue. Like me, my father and siblings could not understand why mother would mourn the death of an oppressor and one of the sons of the colonial masters who were among the earliest persons to occupy our communal land and force us out of it through a draconian labour tenancy system.

Kaspaas was the son of the late Mauritz Eugene Pohl (commonly known as Jambren), the man who, until his death in 1996, owned the three farms located on our ancestral land near Modjadjiskloof, a ‘dorpie’ tucked away about 120km from Polokwane, in the Letaba-Mooketsi valley. Later in the 1980s, Kaspaas acquired a farm of his own, known as Montina, on the land not far from his father’s three farms. Both my mother and father went on to work at Montina, among the many other farms they toiled on after they were forced off their land.

In 2012, the government fined Kaspaas R28 million for failing to comply with the newly promulgated labour regulations. He was not paying the minimum wage, was enforcing illegal salary deductions, and not paying workers for their annual leave days.

At the time Kaspaas died in 2015, it was a decade since the Regional Land Claims Commission (RLCC) office in Polokwane (formerly Pietersburg) wrote to the community endorsing our land claim as “valid” and that we had “a *prima facie* case” (see appendix 4 on page 126) to reclaim our birthright. The Seale Tribal Trust Land Claim was among the first land claims to be lodged in South Africa in December 1998. By the end of the year 2021 – almost a quarter of a century – the community was still waiting.

The longer it took to resolve the land claim, as the government fiddled, the more tensions festered in the community. Suspicions have crept in among some who think that the land

claim committee leaders have connived with the farm owners and/or the land claims commission officials to enrich themselves out of the land. Some believe that the committee's stance on wanting the land returned as the only acceptable restitution – instead of financial compensation – is the cause of the delays in our land claim being resolved. These conflicting views on the type of restitution are threatening to tear families and the community apart.

Not everyone in the community understands that owning the land is a way to preserve it for generations to come and a meaningful way to pay homage to the ancestors. In the midst of such divergent opinions, some, like me, found resonance in the views of the foremost African authors such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. For instance, he once wrote in *Weep Not, Child*, that "any man who had land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had at least an acre of red earth, was better off than the man with money."

J.B Danquah (1928), a Ghanaian lawyer and political activist during that nation's independence movement, puts this as follows: "An absolute sale of land ... was therefore not simply a question of alienating reality; notoriously it was a case of selling a spiritual heritage for a mess of portage, a veritable betrayal of an ancestral trust, an undoing of the hope of posterity."

For many of our community members, however, the lure of money seemed so irresistible that it far outweighs any other consideration. It reality, it is all out of sheer desperation, because of the destitution that many find themselves in. For them, the land claim is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a cash bonanza, and any contrary view borders on a betrayal.

The more the delays before our land claim is resolved, the more those advocating for financial compensation find their voices. As Ruth Hall (2004), a professor at the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), at the University of the Western Cape, puts it in her research paper, *Land reform and agrarian change in South Africa*: A status report 2004, "delays in the process of restoration – and the offer of ready cash to cash-strapped communities – can be a powerful incentive for claimants to opt for financial settlement".

Mother, meanwhile, was not the one to shy away from expressing her views about these matters regarding our land claim, unorthodox as they were. Not only was she resolute in her stance for financial compensation, but she was also vocal in questioning our competence in farming. “Why don’t you just claim all the money and leave the Boers alone on the land? What will you do with the land? What do you know about farming?” she would ask.

Yet, as far as she was concerned, the issue was beyond financial considerations. Her affectionate loyalty to the Afrikaner farmers was something to behold, at least from a master-servant point of view. For her, Kaspaas, his younger brother Mauritz Jean ‘Tickie’ Pohl and their father Jambren seemed like messengers sent to our land by a venerated spirit.



Figure 4: Mauritz Jean ‘Tickie’ Pohl (Kaspaas’s younger brother) with Puledi Mamodjadji Seale (Photo: The Author)

The way she went about praising them, you would swear they were nothing short of the otherworldly beings. “If I had things my way, and could turn back the clock, I would mount wheels on this house and go back to the farm and live with them,” she would say, at the slightest mishap at the village. Kaspaas’s death – which came almost a decade after his father’s demise – was a blow to her heart. Her grief was stark.

She was indefatigable in her defence of Jambren and his sons, so much so that her commiserations for them caused exasperation in our family. It often drove father to the edge. “Did you really have to hitch-hike that far to the farms to attend that funeral? Was it that necessary? How special was he?” father asked, his general lack of tact showing.

Mother flew at him, in a feat of rage. “I am not like you, who went about hopping from one farmer to another and retired with nothing to show! Who are you to decide whether I should attend their funerals? *Makgowa a le kea gešo* (those are our white people.)”

Teddy burst out in laughter, guffawing until his eyes were wet with tears. Mother turned to face him, then me and Nancy. “As for the three of you, you better shut up! You wouldn’t be what you are today if it wasn’t because of Jambren and his children. It was their money that gave you the education and all the things you have today.” At that point, my other younger brother, Meshack, whom the Boers had named Siebert, walked in. “And you, too!” mother said, pointing at him. Meshack was left flummoxed at the unprovoked jibe.

My mother’s overweening habit to remind everyone about what she saw as our family’s indebtedness to the Afrikaner farmers was enough to test my father’s patience. His brow furrowed and he rubbed his scalp rapidly. “What money? Getting paid peanuts once after many months? When, after payment, we were not left with any cash for our preferences?” he retorted.

He was referring to the payment-in-kind system at the time. Farm dwellers were paid paltry wages once every six months, or even a year in some instances. On paydays, which was usually on Saturdays, they were transported in open trucks to a shop near Mooketsi, which was owned by an Indian man. They were each given a piece of paper to present to the shopkeeper, in exchange for whatever goods they needed. Father had again touched my mother’s sensitive nerve. “When you say your personal preferences, you mean cartons? (Sorghum beer in packets)?”

Until that point, I had maintained an uneasy calm, restraining myself. This time, I snapped: “For goodness’ sake, we were their slaves ma. The Boers. Our sweat, our blood, our tears; that’s what all those farms are built on, the properties on our ancestral land. But here you

are mother, defending them yet again. What's wrong with you? Look at you, you are so fragile and sickly because of them."

A deafening silence engulfed the room. For a little while, there was no word, no whimper – just silence. Mother's lips quivered. As usual, her propensity to be offended by any views that she deemed denigrating of Jambren and his sons was apparent. Yet, as usual, she was not the one to be easily cowed into submission. Gazing at father with a sharp, penetrating look, she said: "Jambren never robbed anyone. This one (wagging her finger at father) and Monyebere would, sometimes during the middle of the month, go and claim their wages before (the) six-month (cycle). Then they would go on a drinking spree on weekends. They were tsotsis these ones."

The man she was referring to was Monyebere Mamorobela, who, for many years, worked closely with my father as a tractor operator. At great length, mother explained how the payment system worked. Unless you were familiar with her, you would not discern her biasness towards the Afrikaner farmers. Her clarity of thought and penetrating analysis were remarkable.

"We would finish six months without pay. We got our salary in the second week of July. When that time came, Jambren would count each one's wages month by month, carefully checking the number of days you worked for. He would then say, 'you see how many months you worked for' before giving your money."

Although it is not clear why the farmers were imposing this payment system, it would appear that they were invoking the Native Service Contract Act of 1932. As Padraig O'Malley (1987), who wrote in the O'Malley Archives, explains it, the Act extended labour tenancy to all members of each household on the farm and "forced all tenants on white-owned farms to work between three to six months per year… (and) prevented them from leaving the farm without permission".

"So, you see! They were robbing us!" father retorted. "If I were you, I wouldn't bother going to their funeral." Again, mother was stupefied with rage. "At least I left the farm with something to show. It was my savings that built this home," she said, her voice raising

vindictively. The exasperation in her voice was distinct. The searing heat permeated the room, precipitating the perspiration on her forehead. “I don’t know why you keep tormenting me, and disturbing my peace,” mother said.

Nancy tittered, then tilted her head, sending her hair flying. She heaved a deep sigh and sunk back on the couch. Then she turned to look at me. “What is the latest regarding this land claim that is dragging too long? Soon it will be two decades since it was lodged. Will our people ever get back their land in their lifetime? I’m sorry, but I feel that the whole thing is an unmitigated failure. I am certainly not alone in thinking like this.”

I thought about the elders in our family and community who had died since the land claim was lodged. The surviving elders were in the twilight of their lives, clinging precariously to dear life. I looked at father. He had grown frail in recent years. My mother too. I shuddered. In my state of guilt, my mind slipped back to the time when the land claim idea started and our travails in reclaiming our birthright.

A haunting cry for ancestral land

It was a typical Sunday morning at the village. A soft breeze swept across Mohlabaneng, and tree branches swayed back and forth, whistling and dancing rhythmically. Time and again, young men with beer bottles firmly in their hands passed the street along my home, walking in an awkward, unsteady way. Their high-pitched voices and giggles pierced the air. The way they went about blabbering with authority, it was as if they ruled the world. Dust from a couple yards swirled up in the air. It was the sign of women sweeping their yards, an early Sunday morning ritual at the village.

It was in late October 1998, while I was pruning some flowers, when a car hurtled to a stop next to my gate. It was my paternal uncle, Wilson Mothoka Seale, in his modest Chevrolet station wagon. His car was not roaring with the usual mbaqanga (a Southern African dance music that combines traditional and modern music) hits of Richie S (Richard Siluma)’s *African Dance,* the Soul Brothers’ *Mama ka Sibongile*, and so forth.

On this occasion, he sported a sullen and pensive face, devoid of the geniality and humour that he was known for. Something serious was evidently troubling him. “I see you have been too quiet. I’ve never heard silence quite loud as this,” he said, with biting sarcasm.



Figure 5: Wilson Mothoka Seale was determined to see the ancestral land returned. (Photo: Family album)

He started off in a rather philosophical fashion, asking me what I thought each time I drove past the sprawling farmlands that dot the Letaba-Mooketsi valley.

“What goes through your mind when you drive between our villages and Mooketsi and Modjadjiskloof, seeing all the big lands there? Look at me closely, who do you think I am? I may have an identity document, but it doesn’t define the essence of my existence. I feel that there is something solely missing in me, and that without it I can’t define myself, in terms of culture, my sense of belonging and my self-worth.”

It did not take long to understand that this was a haunting cry for the return of ancestral land, lost as per among others to the insidious and notorious Natives Land Act of 1913 and other subsequent acts. In 1996, when active involvement in party politics, especially membership of the African National Congress (ANC) was fashionable, I had watched as the then president, Nelson Mandela, signed into law the country’s constitution. It was a highly symbolic act that consigned apartheid to history and ushered in a new future for the country. Or so we thought. Among the legislations enacted in the constitution was the

Restitution of Land Rights Act of 1994, and especially Section 25, which acknowledged the right to land restitution.

There was collective optimism, especially among communities who suffered land dispossession, that the ills of the 1913 Natives Land Act and its surrogate legislation, the Natives Trust and Land Act of 1936, would be reversed. While the Natives Land Act of 1913 sought to restrict blacks or native South Africans from owning the land outside of the reserves, the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 was the defining moment for our community.

As O'Malley puts it, the defining clause of the Act was the one that declared that:

"Land subject to the chapter may not be occupied by natives except under certain circumstances unless, he is a servant of the owner [and] registered labour tenant… registered as a squatter… A native who contravenes this provision… shall be guilty of an offence and may be removed from the land upon which he/she is residing."

The effects are also explained in the Regional Land Claims Commission's document endorsing the Seale Tribal Trust Land Claim as valid.

"The systematic downgrading and deprivation of black people of their land rights on their land was a practice carried out by government indirectly and backed by racial laws amongst which the Natives Land Act, 27, of 1913 took upper hand, the Native Trust and Land Act, 18 of 1936 as well as the Native Service Contract Act, 1932. In this case, the Seale people were adversely affected by the provisions of the Natives Land Act of 1913... (the) Native Service Contract 1932, Act, as well as the Native Trust and Land Act, 1936.... which blatantly prohibited ownership of land."

These Acts all had one common purpose; to reduce Africans to servile labour, working for and at the pleasure of their colonial masters. As Sol Plaatje put it in his iconic words, "Awakening on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth."

It would seem that the arrival of the first white person on our land coincided with the promulgation of the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936, at least according to the elders in our community. Mrs. Dora Graham, whom our elders called Mosetsanyana (sotho word for a young woman), arrived at Sutwane (Sedan) in the mid-1930s and declared our land hers. It was effectively an arbitrary occupation that was consistent with the skewed political power-relations that promoted the interests of white people at the expense of black South Africans.

I was among the few sons and daughters of the former farm dwellers who had received formal education up to university level, and I knew the laws and the history of the country pertaining to land dispossession and land reform. As I could work it out at that point, my family felt disempowered to mount any resistance to the land dispossession because the laws of the country favoured white people.

However, I kept procrastinating on the idea of initiating the land claim. This was because, after completing my studies at university, and as the first born in my family, I was still preoccupied with improving the living conditions at our home and helping my siblings through their education.

Now, here was Wilson, with an unusually glum disposition. He, like my parents and many elderly relatives and community members who came from our ancestral land, had never set foot at school. But you could not help noticing that some of them were endowed with a natural intelligence and a noble insight not apparent to everyone. Wilson was one of those, a living proof that a person can be intelligent without being educated and, conversely, that education does not necessarily make a person intelligent. He always distinguished himself by his sharp wit and sound judgment. Distinctly affable, he was a joy to relate and talk to. To borrow from research professor, historian and author, Charles van Onselen, "he was simultaneously a very ordinary man and an extraordinary countryman".

But now, Wilson was no longer at ease.

"I hear many people are claiming their lands, yet you have been silent. No one is saying anything. Everyone. Are you just going to let everything pass with the wind, as if nothing

happened? How do you feel about living in this tiny yard? Do you know why I am struggling to keep even half-a-dozen cattle in my yard today, when we used to have a herd of more than 50 cows? Do you not know why we are stuck here, in these hot, dry and barren lands?"

I wanted to reply but his avalanche of questions pummelled me down.

Have you ever asked yourself, since we were forced off of our land, why we keep going back to the white men's farms begging for jobs, even when they pay us a pittance? How do I call myself a complete person when I know that I struggle every time I want to trace my lineage and my forebears and pay homage to them at their last resting places? I keep on telling my children about the ancient law of survival that "thou shall eat through the sweat of your brow", but how do I preach about that when I don't have the land?"

His eyes wandered restlessly to the distant mountains. His voice rose and fell like a soft wave, and it seemed as if he was on a distant shore, wrestling with all these thoughts to himself. There was an inscrutable mystery about him. I felt a sudden urge to pat him on his shoulder to reassure him of my presence, but I became overwhelmed with guilt.

The fact that it had taken my uncle to jolt me out of complacency about the value of land haunted me. Although Wilson did not say it explicitly, his was making an impassioned plea for urgency about the land claim. It was a desperate plea, filled with sorrow and I felt a sharp lump of regret in my throat that numbed me, literally. I then remembered a scene in *The River Between*, a novel by one of the foremost African writers, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o. An aging father, Chege – who was worried about the breakdown of the African traditional society in the face of Christianity at their village in Kenya –counsels his son, Waiyaki.

"I am old, my time is gone. Remember that you are the last in this line. Arise, heed the prophesy. Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites… A man must rise and save the people in their hour of need. He shall show them the way; he shall lead them."

I also felt as if Wilson's voice came to me from somewhere above, in the same manner that the Biblical Moses was instructed to go and save the Israelites from the house of bondage in Egypt and lead them to the proverbial land flowing with honey and milk.

"This would be a noble worth pursuing. There would be no more fitting a tribute to my parents, relatives and the community's life of toil and sacrifices on the farms than the symbolic act of having the ancestral land returned to them, for the sake of future generations," I thought to myself.

I immediately sprung to action, rallying other relatives around this cause. Meanwhile, the deadline of December 31 loomed large. There was no time to waste.

The long-winded road to reclaiming our birthright

"I am impressed that we are all formal in our jackets. We must all look the part, like the true members of a royal family that we were at our ancestral land before it was taken away from us. And remember that 'there are no shortcuts to the top of the palm tree.'"

With these remarks about the Western codified dress decorum and the importance of perseverance, Wilson led us to his car. This was as we set off on the 120km-odd trip to Pietersburg (now renamed Polokwane), the provincial capital city of the present-day Limpopo Province. There was only one objective: to get our land claim recorded in the register of the Regional Land Claims Commission (RLCC) before the cut-off date (31 December 1998).

The hastily assembled delegation consisted of a triumvirate of the sons of Ramphaka William Seale, our late patriarch who had been the chief on our ancestral land before dispossession. There was Wilson, his elder brother, Isaac Mohale Seale, his younger brother Godfrey Seale, and me. We knew that because we had been racing against time, we had not been able to assemble an inclusive committee that was representative of the entire community, instead of it looking like an all family affair. We were also alert to the fact that due to limited time, we might not have gathered all the substantial information to put

forward a watertight case. At the time, the immediate and pressing consideration was not to miss the crucial deadline of 31 December 1998 to get our land claim registered.

A nervous excitement was palpable as we embarked on the long jaunt on a misty Monday morning. As we passed Ga-Maphalle village (See pages 7 and appendix 8 on 130) and approached Musukudutsi River, the colour of the tarred road suddenly changed from black to golden red. Not so long ago, there used to be a board inscribed with the letters TPA (Transvaal Provincial Administration). Whether it was by design or accident, it was always a stark reminder that we were entering the non-black area.



Figure 6. Mosukudutsi River (Brandboontjiesrivier) along the R81 Road. It formed the border between white commercial farms and Bolobedu in the former Lebowa bantustan.
(Photo: The author)

Across the river is a vast expense of verdant tracts of land on both sides of the road, stretching into the long distance, as far as the eye could see. “Do you see that big tree on our right?” asked Isaac, as soon as we crossed the river. “Wellington (the author’s father) used to have lunch and rest there when he was ploughing the fields. It was him, Jambren, and Monyebere. Sometimes they would work until late in the evening and through the night, by the tractor lights.”

With that single mention of Jambren's name, Isaac triggered what became an animated and lengthy conversation about the many Afrikaner farmers in the Letaba-Mooketsi valley and how our land was taken away. Their names were popular in the region, so much so that you could swear they were legends. There was Jambren's brother Rossi (Stephanus Ross Pohl), and their father Thununu (Stephan Montaque Pohl), as well as Fresie (Freez de Beer) and Jako (a Mr. Duvenage). Of course, the list was not complete without the wealthier and more powerful ZZ2 (Bertie van Zyl), the founder of the largest fresh producing company in the country, if not on the African continent.

Between the 1970s and 1990s, these farmers were feared and revered at the same time in the black communities. When it came to the business of farming, their names radiated power and awe, and it was as if they possessed mythical powers.

"All this is Mantsho, which the Boers called Vaalwater," said Wilson, following up on Isaac's remark reminiscing about his days working as a tractor operator on the farms. "The portion you pointed out to, has been lying fallow for as much as I can remember. Imagine if we had it to ourselves, even if it was just for a year. My cows wouldn't have died of the drought last year," said Wilson. "Apparently, it's called a no-till practice, which is part of the soil recovery strategy," said Godfrey.

The vastness of the land is an envy to villagers cramped in barren villages and passerby travelling through this corridor linking the former homelands of Gazankulu and Lebowa to Gauteng. According to information from the farmers, the combined size of the land was 3000 hectares. We could not independently verify this, but our estimation was that the land is about half the size of the entire Soweto township in Gauteng.

About 5km further the road is a 3m high barbed wire fence. "From here, it's Sedan. It used to be seat of our traditional leadership before the Boers appeared on our land and took it away," said Wilson, to which Isaac responded: "Every time I pass here and see all the land, I am reminded of that woman called Dora (Graham), the first white person to come here and took away our land. She claimed that she bought it from the government." Her name doesn't sound Afrikaner, like the Boers who own the land around here."

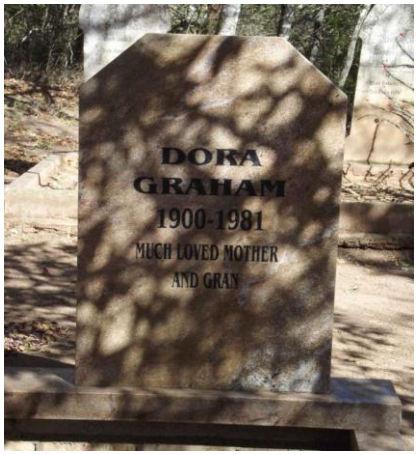


Figure 8. The tombstone of Mrs. Dora Graham in Medingen, near Modjadjiskloof. (Photo: eGGSA Library)

Wilson interjected: "As explained earlier, Thununu (Stephan Montaque Pohl) said he bought it from her. They were selling each other our land, as if we didn't exist. Now, Mandela, the king of all kings, has spoken. The land must be returned."

His eyes wandered back and forth across the landscape, visibly enthralled by the allure of its vast expanse. "Once we get back the land, I will be the chief here," he quipped. "Isaac, you will take Makgobole. Wellington, you can have Vaalwater." Unimpressed, Isaac interjected: "No, no, no. Wellington is the eldest of us, so he must decide which land he wants first. Then it will be me to choose, followed by yourself. That's what tradition dictates, and you can't go against that."

I had interviewed my uncles and other relatives about how the loss of land had happened but the more I saw the land, the more it raised my curiosity. I had always wondered, for instance, why Jambren's name seemed so intertwined with our family history that it was literally passed from generation to generation. "Why does it seem that Jambren's name is so omnipresent in our community history, so much so that he is on everyone's lips. Why is he so synonymous with our birthplace?"

Wilson turned around to look at me. "It is because he was the longest white person we knew and worked under, on the land. Dora didn't stay that long. Thununu was never really actively involved at our land. Once he bought the land from Dora, he gave it to Jambren and

Rossi and bought another land across the other side of the river (Koedoesrivier) and the big road (R81)."

"Why does it seem that you were happy to surrender it so meekly? No resistance, whatsoever," I asked. "It's not like that. That's a simplicity view," replied Wilson. "They were white people, and they had more power. They were the government; they ruled the country. They also had guns. We felt powerless. Helpless."

Godfrey, who had been passively listening to the conversation, asked: "So, what was Dora like? "Not much is known about her," explained Isaac, "except that she was a cattle and horse breeder. After taking over the land, she forced our community into labour tenants. She was said to have been a kind but a no-nonsense 'missus' (Afrikaner word for female boss)".

I remembered what one of the few surviving elders in our community, Freddy Ramatsoma**,** had told me about his rude encounter with Mrs. Graham, when she first came to our land and claimed it as hers. Ramatsoma was born in 1929, although his date of birth was captured as 1930 in his identity document. For a nonagenarian, he has a sharp memory of how the land was lost. He also spoke with so much authority that there was an aura of confidence about his recollections of events on the farm.



Figure 9: Freddy Ramatsoma, one of the elders who fled Sedan farm during the early days of land dispossession. (Photos: The author)

"One day, we woke up to news that the land had been bought by a white woman," he recalled, speaking from his home at Sekhiming village (marked G on the map on page 7. Also see page 130). She was called Dora. She was Irish. The elders told us that she bought it from the government."

As with many other farm dwellers, it was the forced labour tenancy system that forced him to flee the land.

"She said we were working for a place to sleep (stay). How could she expect me to leave my uncle (Mmabatho)'s cattle and look after hers? I refused. That's when she chased me around on horseback. As I ran away, I kept hiding behind trees, so she could not catch me. I fled the farm and walked all the way to Makgakgapatše (village) on foot (about 50 km from the farm). My father and the rest of the family were also chased away as punishment (for his defiance). They gave him a trek pass, and our family left in 1946. Later, on the same year, I heard that Jambren had bought the land."

As I reflected on Ramatsoma's account of the evictions, childhood memories of life at Sedan crowded my memory. In Summer evenings, when the stars were twinkling at varying frequencies, we would listen to my grandmother, Motlhago Seale (Ramphaka's wife), narrating beautiful stories. Most were folktales involving wild animals.

One of her stories, about an encounter between the hare and jackal, went as follows:

"One day, long, long ago when the stones were still soft, there was a jackal that strayed from the rest of the pack and wandered into strange lands. It was attracted by the allure of lush valleys and plains abundant with succulent plants. As darkness fell, the jackal came to a hut in the deep forest, which belonged to a hare. After listening to the jackal's plight, the hare offered a space on the far corner of the hut. As days went by, the jackal kept asking for more space, enticing the hare with promises of free food. No sooner had the two animals made acquaintances than the jackal outfoxed the hare and taken over the shelter."

Grandma paused, knocked a small plastic snuff box against the palm of her hand. She raised the hand towards her mouth, then spread her tongue across the palm until there was nothing left. She then switched her storyline to her early days when she and other relatives were producing crops for subsistence living.

"One day, on a bitterly cold and wet weather evening, a woman with a red skin arrived on horseback. She started setting up a camp on a portion of our land. Within days, the woman brought a herd of cattle and horses. One day in the morning, she came to our house on horseback. She pointed at some young women among us and commanded us come to work at her house as 'kitchen girls'. Later, more people with pale skins arrived. Then the woman left. The newcomers started cultivating the land and instructing us to work for them. They promised to pay us in shillings and pounds."

Grandma's description of the whites reminded me of a passage from the novel, *Devil on the Cross*, by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. In it, he tells how some of the African indigenous people, who, during a community meeting, were discussing the sudden appearance of white men on their land.

"As she stared at them, Waringa noted that their skins were indeed red, like that of pigs or like the skin of a black person who has been scalded with boiling water or who has burned himself with acid creams. Even the hair in their arms and necks stood out stiff and straight like the bristle of an aging hog. The hair on their heads was brownish, the color of moleskin. It was long, it fell to their shoulders as if it had never been shaved or cut out since birth."

In part, grandmother's folktale was consistent with what the elders in the community had told me about the Pohls. They had, upon taking over the land, imposed the same labour tenancy system as Mrs. Graham had done, extracting whatever labour they could from the farm dwellers. The exploitation was often accompanied by brutality.

As we passed Makgobole, the conversation shifted to Kaspaas's iron-fisted reign on the farm in the late 1960s and then through the 1970s. In no time, he had gained notoriety for assaulting farmworkers at a whim. I recalled how mother narrated one of the many incidents, after several labourers did not go to work on one Saturday.

"Kaspaas found out that we didn't report for work. He got very upset that he instructed all of us to queue and whipped us with sticks. It was a long queue. He did not care whether you were pregnant or not, he whipped everybody. I went to him, lay down and told him to beat me at once and finish. Mantshadi Mamorobela (one of the women) protested that she had been away on the Saturday to attend the funeral of her grandchild. Kaspaas would have none of it."

Kaspaas was joined in this alleged brutality by his uncle, Rossi, who owned a farm adjacent to Vaalwater. As the stories went, if he caught anyone harvesting termites, he poured the creatures in the transgressor's body, or forced the person to eat them raw. Tales of his cruelty also included claims that he once killed one of the black labourers on his farm and stuffed his body in a hole.

It is also alleged that he ended up being haunted by the spirits of his victims, so much so that he ended up consulting a well-known sangoma in one of the neighbouring village. This was as he sought to exorcise himself of the "demonic" spells haunting him.

As for the farm dwellers, trying to free themselves from the proverbial house of bondage was not easy. In terms of the laws at the time, no black persons living on the farm could leave unless they had their dompases (an internal apartheid identity document literally nicknamed the 'dumb pass') first stamped by the employer. The dompases had to be carried by black people everywhere they went. If an employer were unhappy with a worker, he could refuse to endorse the book, jeopardising the person's right to be in a different area.

For many, there was only one option. Escape. Those, like my mother, who dared approach Jambren to stamp their identity books, had their requests refused out of hand. Losing their source of labour was the last thing in the mind of the farmers. But the situation had become untenable for the farm dwellers. The ground was fast shifting under their feet and death lurked in the air. The way my mother, my uncles and other elders in our family described it, the period between the late 1970 and 1980 was nothing short of an apocalypse in the history of the farm. Fear and loathing stalked every corner of the farm, and residents left *en masse.* Many found refuge in the barren villages of Bolobedu, while others moved further north in Gazankulu.

Meanwhile, for all this period my uncles narrated their past experiences and encounters with the colonial masters, we had whizzed past the Jachpadt junction, which borders Makgobole (Morgenrood) from other farms that were not part of our land.



Figure 7: Jachpadt junction along the R81 road from Giyani to Mooketsi, in Limpopo Province (Photo: The author)

Soon, we came across ZZ2's bright yellow branded trucks – the sign that we had now entered the firm's territory. The land is so huge that it is more than double the total size of the commercial farms that dotted the Letaba-Mooketsi valley. Until the late 1990s, the trucks were among the many lorries that were so ubiquitous in many villages of Bolobedu and the neighbouring Sekgosese subdistrict, as well as parts of the Gazankulu and Venda bantustans. The trucks traversed villages transporting farmworkers to and from their respective workplaces. I would later meet ZZ2 CEO Tommy van Zyl for an interview on the land reform issues.

Staking a claim to our ancestral land

Suddenly, a few high-rise buildings appeared ahead of us. We had arrived in Polokwane. I fumbled in my bag for a file containing affidavits that Wilson and Isaac had deposed at the Modjadjiskloof police station. Anxiety heightened as we navigated through the maze of traffic, towards the land claim offices in 96 Schoeman Street in downtown Polokwane.

Soon we had reached our destination. The door swung opened, revealing a modest open office space with few desk counters and piles of files. A woman behind the reception desk

directed us to the next desk, where one of the commissioners explained the land claim registration process. After explaining the purpose of our visit, Wilson and Isaac handed in the affidavits that they had deposed at the Modjadjiskloof police station.

In brief, they had in their affidavits explained that their grandfather, Mmabatho Seale, had been the Induna on the land where Jambren's three farms are located, until his death in the early 1920s. In keeping with the leadership lineage, the Modjadji Royal Council appointed Ramphaka (born in 1902) as Mmabatho's successor. Their recollection of the events moved to the dispossession of the land by Mrs. Dora Graham and its acquisition by Jambren. The rest of the evidence was on the land tenancy which effectively forced them off their ancestral land in the 1970s.

That information set in motion what was to be an hour-long questioning by the land claims commissioner. The cross-examination was about our family history, our occupation of the land and its precise location, size as well as the year of dispossession and the forced removals. The lack of archival material had meant that our elders could not immediately provide historical data that was vital to strengthen our land claim case. The difficulty was that most, if not all our elders in the family and community, could not read and write.

As Michele Hay (2016), an independent researcher and honorary fellow at the Centre for African Studies, Edinburgh University, aptly puts it in her research thesis titled *South Africa's Land Reform in Historical perspective: Land settlement and agriculture in Mopani District, Limpopo, 19th century to 2015*, "when land restitution was announced in the 1990s, illiteracy in rural areas was very high, especially amongst the older population and many households were poverty stricken and isolated."

She further states that "… by 31 December 1998, the cut-off date for lodging a land claim, many people may not have had independent access to information regarding land restitution, because of the context of poverty in which they lived."

I had done some research into our family history. I was intrigued at the information that showed that the Seale clan were part of the Balobedu tribe that settled around the area of the present-day Modjadjiskloof about 400 years ago, after migrating south from present-

day Zimbabwe. The clan then moved on the three portions of land in the 1830s, and organised themselves as a community, in accordance with ancient customs and traditions.

After an hour, we were then handed a letter that served as proof that we had lodged our land claim. As a parting short, the man told us that a visitation was to be done, as part of the verification process. Excitement welled up in us as we exited the office building.

"So, what shall we do with the land once we get it back?" asked Godfrey. "We will lease it to those farmers currently occupying it or whoever the experienced farmer wants to use it," I said. "As part of the deal, they should teach us the intricacies of commercial farming, because farming has changed a lot over the years, and they now use sophisticated, modern agricultural methods. We can also venture into partnerships with them to ensure that there is a transfer of skills. Once we are satisfied that we have people who are competent in farming, we can take over the land in phases. Gradually."

About a few metres after we took a detour into the Mooketsi-Giyani R81 Road to the village, a black cat appeared and raced across the road right in front of us. "Damn, this is a sign of bad luck," said Wilson. "Let's turn back and use the other road." After some protestation by me, Wilson proceeded on the same road, although grudgingly.

Later, as I reflected on the land claim and our experiences at the land claims office, I realised that we needed to do a further digging to pierce together more relevant information to strengthen our case. With archival material scant, because most of our community members could not read or write, oral interviews with the elders was the viable source information.

We also needed to refocus our strategy and strengthen the land claim committee to be inclusive of the community. Robert Mokgola, a qualified lawyer and a university graduate whose parents were among the last to leave the farms, was roped in to lead our case. We also got two more elders to depose affidavits. Their account of the events on the farm leading up to the dispossession corroborated that of Wilson and Isaac. With that, the task of tracing more relatives and community members in the diaspora all over the villages of Bolobedu and other areas began in earnest.

Diasporic landowners

In the far northern parts of Limpopo province, along the R81 road between Mooketsi and Giyani, lie two villages that stand facing each other, literally and figuratively. On the northern side, towards Giyani in the former Gazankulu bantustan, is N'wamankena, populated by the Shangaan people. To the south is Makgakgapatše, occupied by the Balobedu in the former Lebowa bantustan (See pages 7 and 130).

Until the advent of democracy in 1994, there was a barbed wire fencing off the two villages from each other. It served as the borderline between Gazankulu and Lebowa. Since the late 1990s, the fence had been gradually falling apart and the two villages edging closer to each other, as if yearning to embrace. But each time they seemed on edge of merging, a mysterious, seismic force appeared and repelled them.

Local folklore legend has it that once upon a time, there existed a multi-coloured, pungent smelling locust in the area. It hopped around the gulf between the two villages, stranded



Figure 10: The multicoloured grasshopper.
(Photo: https://www.sabisabi.com/)

because it was scorned by both sides of the ethnic divide. The Shangaans branded it *Njiyavesha* (a derogatory and offensive Shangaan word to describe what they say is a Sotho locust), while the Balobedu dubbed it *Tšiethoka* (similarly, a derogatory word for 'Shangaan locust'). Despised, rejected and dejected, the locust flew away to distant lands. That was not until it left a curse so serious that it would take both communities to exorcise the tribal demons in them to break the insidious spell.

It is in this bleak realm, at Makgakgapatše village, that my grandmother Mokgadi Ramodisa and other relatives found refuge after they were forced off our ancestral land. *Koko (granny)* Mokgadi is one of the few surviving elders in our family. It was on a drizzling Spring morning of 2019 when I set off to Makgakgapatše. I found *Koko* Mokgadi sitting against a wall, mumbling to herself, as if in a soliloquy of some sort. "Who is it? What does he want?" she asked, upon hearing my voice as I exchanged greetings with her grandchildren. She looked a bit restless and irritable at the 'intruder'.

"Oh, is it Motlhatlego's son?" she said, turning around to face me. "You've grown into a big man now. You were not born when I left the farm," she added, as if she were reading my mind about the purpose of my visit. She struggles with her hearing and eyesight, so I moved closer to her. "So, why did you leave?" I asked, trying to seize the moment and get the most out of her oral testimony.



Figure 11: Mokgadi Ramosibudi (Seale) recalls how she fled from Sedan because of the labour tenancy system (Photos: The author)

"Eh…tjo nna nna weeh (Khelobedu expression of surprise). As if you could have stayed yourself. Haven't your father and mother told you? Would you have worked only for food and a place to sleep?"

I asked her about the white person to come to our land. She started narrating the list of our family tree lineage before and after Mrs. Graham's arrival on our land. "Don't you know your ancestors?" she asked, as she slowly recounted the family tree lineage.

Before I could remind her about my initial question, she said: “We were staying peacefully until one day, when Dora (Graham) came and said, ‘this is my land. If you want to stay here, you should work for me’. I was among the girls who were ordered to work in the kitchen. I ran away because she didn’t want to pay us.”

Upon fleeing, *koko* Mokgadi first lived with relatives at Dingamazi village in Gazankulu. (See pages 7 and 130). Asked why Mrs. Graham did not pay her, she said: “She said we were working for staying on the farm, so what could we have done? Do you think we knew anything?”

She then narrated, in a rather long and winding manner, how she later heard that Mrs. Graham had left Sedan. Although she was not there, she spoke with the authority of an eyewitness. “Thununu later came and chased Dora away (from the land). He took away the land to give to his children Jambren and Rossie.”

Clearly, she had no idea that Jambren ‘bought’ the land”, I thought to myself. I was, however, impressed by her sharp memory of the sequence of events around the land history. Only that she could not remember the year she fled the farm.



Figure 12: Mokgadi Ramodisa,
(Photo: The author)

She paused speaking, then started using her fingers to count. Her eyes shut briefly. Still, she could not figure out when it was. Ultimately, she said: “It was the year of the big rains, when Mosukudutsi burst its banks that it almost flooded our houses. When I left, I didn't know how old I was. But my father (Mmabatho Seale) was still there.”

On whether she would like to have the land back, she said: “Polase (the farm) won’t do anything for you, talk about ‘mašupi’ (ancestral home or the small piece of land where our homestead was built, surrounded by mielie fields and not the entire land in this context). What will you do with the farm? Mašupi is better because they will give you money.” This is the same view as that of my mother, who was unwavering about her desire to return to our ancestral land without disturbing the farmers.

Across the street, stays another of my other uncle, Frederick Sontaga Seale. He is the son of Phetole Seale, who was Ramphaka’s (younger) half-brother. Sontaga came to live at Sedan farm in 1965 because he was looking for a job. He performed just about all the tasks on the farm.



Figure 13: Mokgadi Mmaseisa Seale and her husband, Frederick Sontaga Seale at their home at Makgakgapatse village, Bolobedu. (Photo: The author)

At the packhouse, he worked as a clerk, and became Ramphaka’s most trusted lieutenant. He revealed one of the most exploitative labour practices on the farm. It was mandatory for any farm dwellers wanting to leave the place to first get someone to work on his/her behalf for three months. That meant that the person leaving was responsible for the farmworker’s wages for that period. This was said to be a way of serving a notice period.

“As I was working for someone, I was earning more. While everyone was earning about R1.50c a month, I was earning R6. I was lucky that when I started for Jambren, he paid me R2 a month. Still, it was too little,” Sontaga recalled.

This was later corroborated by my mother when I returned home. If, for instance, you wanted to leave the farm but could not find anyone to work for you, you had to pay six pounds before leaving as a fine. “When your aunt Makoma (my father’s younger sister on the left in the picture below) got married in the villages, she couldn’t pay. So, she fled. That was the last time we saw her on the farm. We only saw her after we left too.” This was confirmed by Makoma.



Figure 14: Blood knot: From L to R: Makoma Seale, Wellington Seale and Makosha Seale (Photo: Family album)

Returning to the farm was too risky. The farmers had their puppets in the community who could blow the whistle on the ‘fugitives’. If caught, they were subjected to rounds of whipping with sjamboks, or murder, in the worst-case scenario. My father and another uncle of mine, David Moraka Seale – who had escaped to Johannesburg and the Rustenburg platinum mines – had their lucky stars to thank for their daring acts to return to the farm.

It was at dusk on Christmas eve in 1976, when they attempted their homecoming. Father recalled that after alighting a bus along the tar road, he embarked on a 5km walk to our home on the farm. Danger was always lurking, so he occasionally avoided the narrow road and walked in bushes.

Going straight home was also too risky, so he hid at neighbour's house on the farm. He then slipped into our home at around midnight at the first crack of dawn. He would skip the farm and went to spend the day at a relative's home at Ga-Maphalle village. That was to be his last visit to the farm. By the time he returned in 1977, home was in the barren villages of Bolobedu.

David, meanwhile, appeared to push his luck way too far when he attempted his second 'homecoming'. After sneaking out of the farm unnoticed, he made another daring attempt to return, in grandfather's car. Unbeknown to him, the puppets had blown the whistle on him. A convoy of 'Boer commando vehicles' backed by others on horseback, descended on our family compound wielding guns. They ransacked the houses, searching for him. When they left, grandfather went to wait for David at a shallow bridge in Mosukudutsi River, wary of his surreptitious act. Luckily, word of danger lurking reached him before he arrived on the farm.

Sontaga also revealed Ramphaka's unbridled loyalty to the Afrikaner farmers. "While I was selling cabbage, Ramphaka would say, 'Sontaga, don't take anything. How can you steal from a person who helps you?'" Sontaga's recollections were consistent with what my father once told me about grandfather. Father narrated an incident when he complained about the paltry wages. Grandfather responded: "What do you want the money for? They cultivate the mielie fields for you freely, and you have all the food you want."

Information from many of the elders suggest that my grandfather was paid relatively well, albeit only once a year. Whatever the motive of Afrikaner farmers was, if they were using the divide and rule by appeasement strategy, it might just have done enough a trick in managing any dissent. The community seemed resigned to submission about the living and working conditions on the farm.

This extended to the loss of land. It could have been because of the political power relations of the time, that gave white people unfettered powers. In the far-flung parts of the country, white people struck so much fear among the indigenous people that they timidly surrendered the land without resistance. In their vulnerability, many black farming communities put on a mask of stoicism and sturdiness. If it was not the fear factor, the whites cowed their 'subjects' into submission and malleability.

"We didn't realise we were suffering; we just thought it was a normal way of life," said Maseisa Mokgadi Seale, Sontaga's wife. She was a late comer to the farm, having gone there in 1976 to live with her mother after she fell ill. When she recovered, she started working on the farm. Her job entailed picking tomatoes in the fields before she was transferred to the packhouse to sort and package them before they could be transported to the fresh produce markets in Johannesburg or elsewhere.

"We were earning 20c a day, which we got paid only once after six months. Sometimes we would start work at 3am and knock off late in the evening. We didn't realise that we were suffering because there wasn't much to buy, as we were surviving on maize meal, tomatoes and cabbage."

I bade the family goodbye and headed to Ga-Maphalle. Some 200 metres into the village, the sight of women waiting next to the communal tap greeted me.



Figure 15. Residents of Ga-Maphalle village in Bolobedu, outside Modjadjiskloof, queueing for water in the late afternoon. (Photo: The author)

Some had their children firmly strapped on their backs. This is a familiar sight in the villages. With the rains failing in recent years, the semi-arid conditions have worsened. The communal taps can only yield trickles of water. On some days, they run dry, forcing villagers to buy. A 20 litre plastic container costs R2.

About 500m from the main road is the home of the Rasesepa family. They were among the most recognisable families at Sedan. I found the elderly couple, Johannes and Mamotheteni Rasesepa, sitting with their elder daughter Mmapula, who is among the land claims committee leaders. They, too, told of their exploitation in the hands of the white men on the farm.

But theirs has all the hallmarks of a subplot. For as much as I could remember, stories abounded that the family endured constant nightly raids. Their sin: Mmapula happened to be in love with one of the white men on the farm. Malewane, as the man was popularly known, was a mechanic at Sedan. The white farmers, apparently irked by the cross-racial love affair, allegedly wasted no time in setting the police on the couple.



Figure 16. From L. Mmamotheteni Rasesepa, her husband Makonya Rasesepa and daughter Mmapula at their home at Ga-Maphalle village (Photo: The author)

Three of Mmapula's children are said to have died under mysterious circumstances. Speculation was rife that the white farmers had conspired with a local doctor to kill the infants using lethal injection. Although these claims are widely spoken of as the "truth" among the former farm dwellers, I could not verify the veracity of such allegations.

When I put these claims to Mmapula, she could neither deny nor confirm the allegations, only saying it was her suspicion. She and her parents, however, confirmed that the police and the white farmers had been unequivocal in their communication with her that it was "unacceptable for a black person her to have children 'white children'", let alone date a white person.

In some instances, each time after giving birth, Mmapula was forced to go and show her baby to the police in Duiwelskloof (Modjadjiskloof) as proof that the child was not white. She recounted in incident when, after she gave birth to her third child, she 'stole' a child of Mmaseisa to present to the cops at Duiwelskloof police station. This was also corroborated by Mmaseisa as well as her parents.

Many other people narrated the familiar stories of conditions akin to serfdom that led to the forced departures and living on barren lands. Their accounts bore a similar and familiar account, only dissimilar in their details and specifics. Overall, they were woven together by the thread of disparity and fatalism.

A coalesce of restless ancestral spirits

After weeks of sustained heatwave in Grahamstown (now renamed Makhanda), a steady soft downpour came in the morning, greeting the earth with the splendour of its music. Incessant raindrops tapped the window of my room overlooking the iconic 1820 Settlers National Monument. A thick blanket of mist covered the monument, which can be said to be a symbol of the victory of White South Africans over the Xhosas during one of the episodes of the Frontier Wars, and conversely, a painful reminder of the subjugation of the Xhosa people and the plundering of their land and theft of their cattle.

Suddenly, my cellphone rang, its soft ringtone blending with the sound of the rain. The man on the other side of the call was Robert Mokgola, whom we had roped in to lead the Seale Tribal Land Trust Claim. “We have just received the letter confirming the validity of our land claim. Give me a moment, it will land in your (email) inbox shortly,” he said, excitedly.

It was in the Autumn of 2005, while I was studying journalism at Rhodes University. I immediately reached out for my laptop. A quick glance at the email, and I felt a surge of excitement through my body.

The six-page letter concluded as follows, in part:

“On the basis of the afore-mentioned information, the Office of the Regional Land Claims Commission: Limpopo Province is therefore convinced that the Seale Tribal Trust have a ‘prima-facie’ valid claim in terms of the Restitution of Land Rights Act…”

In arriving at that decision, the commission found that the Seale Tribal Trust Land Claim “substantially complies with the requirements... of the Restitution Act”.

"The Seale community stayed on the farms from time immemorial and enjoyed de facto rights of ownership, customary land rights until the arrival of the white people in the 1930s. The community's rights on the farm were downgraded to labour tenancy until finally removed between the years 1950s and 1970s... It is therefore, recommended that the Seale Tribal Land Claim be accepted as a prima facie valid claim and be approved for gazetting".

I felt as if I was waking from a dream. Suddenly, something that would open a whole new realm of possibilities had happened for the sons and daughters of our ancestors who were stripped of their land rights and turned into servile labourers. I wanted to let out an exultant yell and had to muster all the strength to conceal my excitement. The intermittent, haunting cries of a turtle dove hit me with nostalgia about the years gone by at Sedan and other farms, our ancestral land.

That night, I dreamt seeing Sedan, resplendent in its lush, verdant tracts of land. Cattle and goats freely grazed in the pastures among the horses and ostriches, while a flock of oxpeckers occasionally landed and clung on to the animals to remove ticks and maggots from their hides. A pastoral festival of a different kind was in full display as more animals grazed opposite the fields that were so abundant with mielies, watermelons, sweet potatoes, spinach, cabbage, and other crops. I saw bakkies from the nearby villages lining up to buy, as the area was transformed into a fruit and vegetable market.

Two years earlier, in 2003, officials from the RLCC had written to the community notifying us that they were due to visit the farms that were under the land claim to verify the validity of our case. That had sparked a frantic effort for the land claims committee to inform and brief the community about our impending moment of reckoning.

Soon our date with the RLCC officials came. That day, as we waited for bakkies to ferry the community to the farms to identify our homesteads, graves and other important sites, I saw powdery dust particles floating down a stream of golden sunlight. In that beam of light, among the motes, I saw images of the elders in our community standing beside the road with their luggage and all sorts of paraphernalia, waiting to return to the ancestral land. It was a long procession of them.

There was our great-grandfather, Mmabatho, who died in the early 1920s and his successor Ramphaka, who died in 1993. Ramphaka's death came at a critical historical juncture in the history of South Africa, when the country was only emerging from the dark and virulent dream of apartheid and marching towards the dawn of democracy.

Ramphaka's blue ensembles was topped by a crown that completed his regal mien. He was flanked by his two wives, Motlhago and Mmamosibudi. Not far from Ramphaka were his brothers Mampše, Phetole, Mokoboro, as well his sisters Maite and Mokgadi. There were other well-known elders in the community, such as Mack and Monyebere Mamorobela, the more assertive Ramotsetela Rasesepa, as well as Monyepota Thobakgale and his witty son, Lebeko (David), who was popularly known by his nickname Ogies.

Most of them died when the ideal of land reform was a distant dream, something beyond their wildest imagination. Now, many of their grandchildren carry their names, which get passed from generation to generation. Yet, the land remains in the hands of the Afrikaner farmers.



Figure 17. The gravesite of Ramphaka William Seale, at Ga-Maphalle village (Photo: The author)

As the bakkies rolled into Sutwane and approached Mosukudutsi River, they came to a halt. Everyone alighted. In the front was Ramphaka. He knelt and kissed the ground. The rest of the elders followed suit and started performing rituals, scattering snuff and pouring libations (i.e. homemade sorghum beer) on the ground while invoking their ancestral

spirits. As soon as they had finished, women broke into ululation. Some elderly men blew horns, while others leapt in the air, striking warrior poses in celebration of what was a triumphant return to their land. In unison, they sang, danced and pranced around in celebration.

The words of Alvin O. Thompson, Professor of African and Caribbean History, came to mind:

Mother Earth spawned them and to Mother Earth they return so that whether in life or death the silver chord that bound the two together would not be broken… For the living, the land gave permanence, stability and meaning to the material universe…. As a unit of social value, it helped to keep [them] together in a stable and coherent social relationship.

A brief, crashing thunderstorm interrupted my reverie, and brought me back to reality! My grandfather and the other elders were not among the entourage of community members. It all seemed like their restless spirits visiting me, reminding me that what they yearned for was a permanent return to the 'promised land'.

We then moved from one household to another, often splitting in family groups to identify some of our respective important sites. Our family homestead was among the first sites we visited. What was once a bustling home comprising several houses was a shadow of the place it was. Broken, knee-high mud walls anchored with stones was all that was left. The ruins were a common feature at many other homes.

After about three hours, when weariness began to take its toll, the 'expatriates' gathered at the main farmhouse, near the home of Jambren. They were met by two young white men who introduced themselves as the grandsons of Jambren. I was surprised at the hospitality with which they received us. At some point, they asked us if we would be happy to accept money as compensation for the land loss.

As I sat on the wooden bench among on the elevated area overlooking the farm, my mind flashed back to my interviews with some of the community members about their forced departure the other farms. Their stories were dominated by the same message; they could no longer bear the exploitation or physical assaults on their ancestral land.

From landowners to roving pariahs

It was in the early hours of the first day of February of 1977 that our family took whatever goods they could and tossed them into my grandfather's bakkie. They hurriedly clambered on to it and off they crossed Mosukudutsi River and headed to new destinations. Others, including women with children wailing on their backs, either trudged all the way to neighbouring villages or walked to the main road to hitchhike. Fear stalked every corner of the farm. Although the farmers did not want to lose their convenient source of labour, it seemed that they were not that averse to the community leaving.

Only my grandfather and his second wife, Mmamosibudi Seale, remained on the farm, unable to come to terms with leaving the land that had been the only home they had ever known since birth. For Ramphaka, his sense of self seemed so tied to the land that it defined his identity. In his case, it was more of the land owning him as much – more than he had ever hoped of owning it.

As for the 'expatriates', the search for a new home turned them into roving pariahs – overnight. For several days, they trudged from one village to another in the semi-arid villages, searching for a place to call home. As my mother found out, the home became 'the here', that became 'the there' that kept changing. It was the experiences not too different from that of refugees, spending time running, relocating and waiting in vain.

On the first night, she took refuge at a house of one of Ramphaka's relatives at Ga-Maphalle. The following morning, she embarked on a long trudge to Mohlabaneng, about 8km away, with two-year-old Nancy firmly strapped on her back and Teddy (8) and Meshack (5) in tow. Her travails continued with another walk on the next day, this time to the neighbouring village of Jamela, about 5km away (See pages 7 and 130). There, they squatted at the home of Ramphaka's younger sister, Maite, commonly known as Mfolane.



Figure 18. The home where my mother and other relatives stayed in at Jamela village, Bolobedu, after they were forced off their land. INSERT: Maite "Mfolane" Seale, Ramphaka's younger sister. (Photo: The author)

While mother was there, she and Isaac's wife, also known as Maite, started searching for a permanent home. Factors such as the availability of water and proximity to the road all played their part in determining a suitable settlement. As was the norm at the time, tribal sentiments creeped in.

"We first went to Ga-Maphalle because it was closer to the farm. But we didn't like the place because there was no water. We moved to Shawela (marked D on the map on page 7) but we didn't like the fact that there were too many Shangaans. At Jamela, there was no water too. So, we settled for Mohlabaneng," mother recalled.

It was my uncle, David Moraka Seale, who had identified the site at Ga-Monwana section of Mohlabaneng. "I wanted a site that was closer to the road so that I could easily catch the trucks to the farms. But your father insisted that he wanted to stay next to David and Isaac," mother said.

In any case, it was a decree in Mohlabaneng that people who came from the farms were allocated a site at Ga-Monwana section. Almost by design, the settlement was nothing more

than an impoverished hinterland to provide labour to the farmers, in a similar way that townships were to the metropolis in the urban areas. All the yards at Ga-Monwana were tiny, about the size of pieces of land cramped with matchbox houses in urban areas. The settlement was a ramshackle arrangement of rickety mud huts with thatch roofs, interspersed with a few modest corrugated iron houses.

Intermittent rains made the task of building the new home difficult. As mother and Maite (Isaac's wife) were building the huts, it would start raining and wash off the clay soil. When it subsided, they started building again, but it would rain again. One of the huts that mother built was a *mokobe* (grass thatch roof hut that is used as a makeshift kitchen). Yet, even the rest of the huts were not too different from it.

In the words of Doris Lessing, the Nobel Prize-winning author, the huts "looked like natural growths from the ground, rather man-made dwellings. It was a though a giant black hand had reached down from the sky, picked up a handful of sticks and grass, and dropped them magically on the earth in the form of huts. They were grass-roofed, with pole walls plastered with mud, and single row doors, with no windows".

It was as if the huts were built with a sense of foreboding about the future. As for the 'kitchen,' plumes of thick smoke sipped through the grass thatch roof each time we made the fire. As Doris Lessing would say, "the smoke from the fires inside percolated through the thatch or drifted in clouds from the doorway, so that each had the appearance of smouldering slowly within" Residents were not allowed to breed livestock. If anyone dared keep goats, cattle, donkeys or pigs, they risked a hefty fine. Yet, goats and cattle from Mohlabaneng roamed the streets of Ga-Monwana. Residents of Mohlabaneng also despised those from Ga-Monwana so much that derogatory epithets such as *makompo* (backward people from the farms), thieves and bullies were common.

In his novel, *Down Second Avenue*, one of South Africa's finest writers, Es'kia Mphahlele, describes this incongruity at his birthplace at Maupaneng village, outside Polokwane, as follows:

"On one side of the river were Christian communities living together according to whether they were Methodists, Presbyterians, Dutch Reformists. On the other side there were tribal

kraal communities. The Christians called them 'heathens'. We were often told there were witches' among the 'heathens'; and so we were not to walk on their footprints if we knew they had walked there; we were told to hold our breath when we passed them because they smeared witches' fat on their bodies; we were told not to stray among their villages because they were addicted to whipping Christians. But we often went across to look for lost goats or donkeys and they received us warmly, if with aloofness, at their communal fire-places."

No sooner had our family settled at Mohlabaneng than tragedy struck. Isaac's wife died after a short illness. It was this tragedy that precipitated Ramphaka's departure from Sedan, so that he could be closer to his subjects in the diaspora. But then, there was a serious dilemma for him that shone the spotlight on the Balobedu traditional leadership regulations. Whatever village Ramphaka wanted to move to, the Induna of the settlement was to vacate his position because Ramphaka was deemed more senior. This meant that Ramphaka could not register the site at the village he wanted to stay under his name. After squatting for a while at Jamela, he bought a house at Ga-Maphalle, which he registered under Wilson's name.

Before that, he had already taken his livestock to a village called Polaseng, about 20km away from Sedan. Ironically, the name Polaseng means the place of farming, although its landscape was just as dreary as many other villages in Bolobedu. It was the beginning of the loss of livestock. The cattle disappeared mysteriously.

The loss of land not only resulted in the loss of livestock and property; it also marked the beginning of the crumbling of the Seale dynasty. Many of the subjects are now scattered in barren villages in Bolobedu and parts of Gazankulu, cursed by poverty and deprivation. As Sol Plaatje once said: "More native families crossed the river and went inland… and as nothing had since been heard of them, it would seem that they were still wandering somewhere, and incidentally becoming well versed in the (circumstances that were) responsible for their compulsory unsettlement."

For some, like my mother, there was only one way to survive: join the destitute masses in the villages travelling to and from the farms for work daily. "When we finished building two huts, after a month, Jambren came here with (Alfred) Mokgola and said, 'come back to work

on Monday'. I went. What would I have eaten when I didn't even have maize meal? It was not like I had a choice."

Renowned South African author, Bessie Head (2016), aptly explains the devastating impact of this legislation on indigenous people, in a moving preamble to Sol Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa*

"It is possible that no other legislation has so deeply affected the lives of black people in South Africa as the Natives' Land Act of 1913. It created overnight a floating landless proletariat whose labour could be used and manipulated at will, and ensured that ownership of the land had finally and securely passed into the hands of the ruling white race…"

In my state of delirium, I saw Wilson in front of me, clad in white clothes. His untimely death in March 2013 hit me like an arrow piercing through my heart. Prior to his death, Nelson



Figure 19. Visionary: Mothoka Wilson Seale (Photo: The author)

Mandela had been ill, and he had, at every opportunity, reminded us to keep pushing for the land claim before Madiba died. I remembered his words when we last met:

"If Mandela dies before we get our land, we might as well kiss it goodbye. Each time I tune in the radio to listen to the news of late, there is a story after story of corruption involving politicians unfairly benefitting from the land claims. I heard that some politicians are even

flirting with big farmers whose farms are on the list of those under our land claims. I am scared because some of our land is now owned by powerful farmers like ZZ2."

When I looked at him again, he appeared in a swollen river, thrashing about vainly to avoid drowning. Iron bands of panic tightened around my chest. It took everything I had not to scream aloud. The piercing sound of siren on the farm – signaling the end of lunchtime on the farm. The siren shook me from my trance. For the Seale community, it was time to go back *home,* to the villages. We left the farm with a feeling of satisfaction and great anticipation that soon, maybe soon, the real homecoming would happen.

Later in 2004, officials from the RLCC visited the community to do a membership verification process. Despite the slow communication lines at the time, word had spread like wildfire that the 'land claims commission' would be coming. As many as 200 members of the Seale community, mostly elders, flocked to the local community hall at Mohlabaneng village. Apart from screening the community members, the process was also to ensure that there were no counterclaims to our land claim. We were more upbeat that it was a matter of time before our land was restored. Or so we thought.

The elusive quest to reclaim the land of our ancestors

A horde of beetles frantically rolled balls of animal dung through an uneven, threadbare surface towards a lush area in the garden outside my cottage. Time and again, as the procession of beetles appeared to reach their destination, two giant lizards appeared and menacingly slithered towards the beetles' territory. This forced the beetles to scurry away. As soon as the lizards were out of sight, the beetles would resume their arduous task. Yet, the lizards lied in wait, ready to thwart the beetles' quest to reach their homely destination.

I was fixated on this activity when my cellphone rang. It was my uncle Wilson Mothoka Seale, alerting me to the news he had just received from Robert Mokgola about an email from the RLCC. The farmers were opposing our land claim. I rushed to the house and grabbed my laptop.

"They [Seale Community] did not occupy any white farms under the authority of a chief or a leader designated by a tribal hierarchy. There is no evidence that they occupied the white farms as a group in accordance with ancient customs and traditions. Indeed, there is no evidence whatsoever that a community existed on the properties in question."

And so went the farmers' response to our land claim. The 12-page document, under the headline, "Landowners Response: Seale Community Land Claim", was dated March 2006. It was just over a year after the RLCC found that our land claim was valid and that we had a *prima facie* case. In their response, the farmers summed up their case as follows:

"It is the landowners' submission that the RLCC has used his imagination in constructing that a community ever existed on the property as there is absolutely no information contained in the acceptance report which meets the definition of a community..."

Wilson sounded distraught and agitated. "Remember that day when a black cat crossed the road in front of us at Mooketsi. I told you it was a curse, and you wouldn't listen."

For all his natural wisdom, the one thing that Wilson could not untangle himself from was superstition. He had this tendency to attribute any misfortune to an invisible, strange force that he believed had cast an evil spell on him. He would often dabble himself in herbal treatments and other type of traditional medicines, believing that it was an effective way to protect himself from whatever sorcery he thought of.

At the time he phoned me, I was in Johannesburg, having just started a new career as a journalist for *The Star,* one of South Africa's leading daily newspapers at the time. I was charged – determined to do everything within my powers to fight any attempts to thwart our quest to reclaim our birthright. I was also encouraged by the fact that Robert Mokgola was already an established legal practitioner.

Firstly, we could not understand why the RLCC had, in their document, referred to the farmers as the "landowners". More absurd was the farmers' argument that our community did not exist as a community. Our family had close ties with the Modjadji Royal House and my great-grandparents' role in the traditional leadership were acknowledged by the tribal council. The farmers had further raised a legal question about the land in dispute,

suggesting that it did not fall within the Land Restitution Act. They claimed that they had acquired the land before 1913 and indeed from the date 1892.

"... The only conclusion that the landowners can arrive at is that the claim is without foundation and invalid. Indeed, with the information contained in the acceptance report, it would seem that the claim is in fact frivolous and vexatious."

This was an unfounded and baseless claim because my great-grandfather, Mmabatho Seale, had been the Induna on the land since the 1880s. Nevertheless, we were not too bothered because we had it on good record that the white colonialists only arrived at our land in the 1930s. Almost everyone, of not all, of the elders in our community knew that Mrs. Graham was the first white person to appear on our land and declare it as hers. This piece of information was passed from one generation to another.

Curiously, and disgracefully, the farmers based their argument on affidavits of two former farmworkers who at the time of deposing their affidavits worked at ZZ2. There was a sense of betrayal about this, but we understood that conditions at the time were such that farmworkers were not only ignorant and oblivious to the issues around land ownership, but that they also felt beholden to their masters. Besides, the fact that the two were working for the farmers meant that they were more inclined – and indeed obliged – to support their masters' case.

Not only were the affidavits too limited on information, but they were also riddled with factual inaccuracies, including the date of some of the farm dwellers'(forced) departures from the land. They stated, for instance, that the Seales departed Sedan in 1999, which was ridiculous and laughable.

As the land claims committee, we had known all along that the farmers would want to mount a strong legal challenge to our case. When eventually it came, we regarded it as a declaration of war on the community. "The fight is on," said Wilson. He and Isaac were at the time working at ZZ2, the firm which had acquired some of the farms where our land was located. "If it means losing our job, let it be. We won't give up our land cheaply," said Wilson, upon hearing that ZZ2 was among the farmers opposing our land claim.

Now it was up to the RLCC to decide on the date for our matter to be heard at the Land Claims Court in Randburg. We were relieved when in March 2006, we received a letter from the RLCC showing that the commission had no intention to withdraw our land claim. In the letter, the commission also informed the farmers, through their legal representatives, that it had no intention to withdraw our case. It also indicated that it was ready to negotiate with the white farmers for a settlement that would pave the way for the return or our land or a compensation, whatever the outcome was to be.

"The commission wishes to propose negotiations around settlement of (the) Seale Community Land Claim, unless your client's (sic) are of the view that no settlement will be reached. In the event of the latter, the commission shall have no option but either to refer the matter to the Land Claims Court or to make a submission to the Minister (of Agriculture and Land Affairs) ..." (See appendix 5 on page 127).

Now, there was renewed hope that it was just a matter of time before our land was returned. However, we started receiving emails from the RLCC for meetings between our community and the farmers. All of these were to no avail. And so the waiting continued.

As time dragged on with no resolution to our land claim, another complication arose. Around 2009, the Modjadji Royal Council apparently tried to ensnare our cause. Clandestine visits by their messengers to our elders became frequent, with orders that they were wanted at Khetakoni, the seat of the Modjadji traditional leadership in Bolobedu, about 40km away. The purpose, as we later found out, was to co-opt them into their committees to claim the tracts of land around the Letaba-Mooketsi valley. Our land was among those that were earmarked for incorporation into their claim.

We were taken aback by this sudden move because the Modjadji Royal Council knew all along about our family's close ties to their lineage. Despite their mystic and legendary rainmaking powers associated with the Queen Modjadji dynasty waning over recent years, the royal house continued to wield power all over their subjects. Their word held so much sway that if any villager were summoned, he would literally go there running.

Suddenly, we were faced with challenges from two fronts, because of the pending case with the farmers. In the case of the Modjadji Tribal Council, we viewed their actions as not too

different from the position taken by the late Zulu Monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini, who wanted territories he governed in Kwa-Zulu excluded from government's land reform. We regarded this move by the Modjadji Royal Council with a great deal of contempt and exasperation because it was nothing more than an intent to usurp our rights over land, and an act of provocation.

Alarmed, we visited Khethakoni to negotiate that we be allowed to reclaim our land independently. The delegation comprised Robert Mokgola, his elder brother Nelson (Mokgola), my uncle Wilson Seale and myself. After about an hour of putting our case to the tribal council, we were given two letters, one confirming that the Seales existed as a community under the leadership of William Ramphaka Seale, and the other endorsing the Seale Community as the rightful and legitimate claimant of the above-listed farms.

"We, the Balobedu ba Modjadji Land Claims Committee acknowledge that Seale Community is part of the Balobedu and have lodged their land claim independently. We therefore have no objection to their claim and as such give them a green light to go ahead with their claim. We will support them all the way until the farms they are claiming will be [sick] given back to them.

"This endorsement put to rest any dispute or conflict of interest that may have existed between the Seale Community and any other community that may have lodged a counter claim against them. We hope this will assist the commission to fast track the restitution of the above mentioned farms to the Seale Community, which is the rightful and lawful owner." (See appendix 6 on page 128).

There was a palpable feeling of relief as we headed back home. Our case had been strengthened by backing of the Modjadji Royal Council. Buoyed by this, we shifted our attention to the RLCC, pursuing our case with more zeal and grit. Our understanding was the next course of action was for the matter to be heard in the Land Claims Court in Randburg, Johannesburg, with white commercial farmers diametrically opposing our claim.

However, as matters stood, we were clutching at straws. Suddenly, the RLCC officials, whom we had pinned all our hopes on, seemed determined in contriving to thwart our quest to reclaim our land. A long spell of sustained silence followed. This had been

happening since 2006 when we received a notice that the farmers were opposing our land claim, but we thought the silence was only temporary because the commission needed more time to o resolve the matter.

When reality dawned that nothing was forthcoming, we approached the office in 2011. Much to our dismay, and adding insult to injury, the RLCC said the verification records were missing and that a proper verification of the claimants was to be done. Yet, this was never done. Our hopes were again raised later that year, after our complaints, when we were informed that a directive had been issued for our land claim be prioritised. Progress meetings were to be held with the community every six months and a plan of action was to be shared with the community by January 2012. So we were promised.

All of that was never done, and another sustained lull followed, this time last for five years (2017). This was despite our repeated pleas, through emails, requesting the commission to come and address the community on the progress update. Our requests were partly because suspicions were creeping in among some of our community members that the land claims committee was contriving with the RLCC and/or the farmers to enrich themselves out of the land. The only communication we received was when RLLC phoned Robert Mokgola, claiming that the commission would hold a meeting with the farmers. The Commission also claimed that they planned to hold meeting with one of the farmers, whom we were told was prepared to sell a percentage of his shares of the land. Yet again, nothing happened thereafter, and we remained in the limbo.

In October 2017, we were provided with the plan of action that included set “dates of meetings with the farmers”. However, the plan was later changed and replaced with the wording, “date of the proposed meetings will be announced”. After a lengthy period of back and forth communication, we received an email in April 2020 notifying us that as the “landowners are objecting to the validity of your claim, the claim was in the process of being referred to the Land Claims Court”. More than year later, we are still waiting.

Twice, we had written to the RLCC complaining that the inordinate delays emanate solely as a result of the failure by the officials to do their work and not being (properly) supervised. We have also been consistent in reminding the office that the delays were solely because of the failure of commission to do its work diligently. Visits to the RLCC offices did not bear any fruit. In between, regular changes and/or resignations of administrative officers, including those allocated to our land claim, became common. Administrative capacity deteriorated. It all seemed chaotic, and the entire process is disarray.

When I approached the RLCC April 2020, I was referred to a Mr. Tuwani Tsotheli, whom I was advised is now the new official handling our land claim. He has been seconded to the Vhembe and Mopani districts (our land claim is in latter district). I have literally lost count of the change in hands our case has been through since inception. Approached for comment, Mr. Tshotheli conceded to the delays but said he only became aware of our land claim in January when he was seconded to the two districts. He promised that the matter would be prioritsed, even going as far as to say it was being fast-tracked.

Mr. Tsotheli added documents to refer the matter to the Land Claims Court were signed around mid-April. “There were documents that were moved from one office to another because there was fire. We had to redo the memo (memorandum), which we have since sent to the legal department. If the legal department is satisfied, they will send the memorandum to the Chief Director of the Commission to approve (the referral to the Land Claims Court).”

These promises were nothing new. The community had become accustomed to such undertakings, as the waiting continued. The extent of the disappointment in the community was poignantly expressed by Ramatsoma (one of the last surviving elders in our community) in January 2021. Like many others, he enquired about the financial compensation. “The money from mašupi (our place of origin), where did it end? Many have received their monies for the land.”

At great effort, I explained to him the reasons for the delay. He was less convinced, and the anger and frustration was palpable in his voice. “How does it flop? It was started by

(Nelson) Mandela. They (the government) must know that this was declared by Mandela, the world leader. It was the law that he introduced, and it must be concluded. How can they say so when they come from Hollander (sic)? It's not their land. This thing upsets me a lot!"

Now, with almost a quarter of a century since we lodged our land claim, we are at our wits' end as to the next course of action to take. As an option, we have recently resolved to approach the national office of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights in Pretoria. But if the number of times it took us before we got our telephone calls answered is anything to by, we are not that convinced that they will have anything different to offer than the indifferent and lackadaisical attitude of the regional office in Polokwane.

Ordinarily, ANC politicians could be another option. However, judging by the way some cabinet ministers and local leaders (premiers and mayors) have been flirting with farmers like ZZ2, we are sceptical. Besides, stories abound of how unscrupulous politicians and government officials have conspired to cash in from communities' land. As such, ANC politicians do not inspire confidence either. Ultimately, the Human Rights lawyers could be the last option.

Cry Me a River

Return to innocence



Figure 19. Popomeni dam in Mosukudutsi River, the site of our daily pastime of swimming and fishing. (Photo: The author)

An eerie silence hung over the river as my father and I moved upstream. Majestic trees, towering above the sky, were menacing in their silent gazes. A crackling sound almost sent me tumbling. It was a twig breaking behind me, from father stumbling over dry, thick patches of grass. Suddenly, we sighted a cliff that sprouted out of a colony of large granite boulders. Their smooth, broad surfaces gleamed under the mid-morning winter sun.

"Popomeni!" exclaimed my father. He was referring to the dam. My heart pounded; cold fear and hot excitement jostling as a wave of nostalgia hit me hard. Memories of my childhood flooded my mind – scenes of my siblings and I swimming in the river on the farm we once called home. All of a sudden, I felt as if my yesteryears had returned, and had become my today. However, it amounted to a tantalising mirage.



Figure 21. Motlhatlego Wellington Seale surveying the flat boulders in Mosukudutsi River (Brandboontjiesriver) on his return to Sedan farm after many years. (Photo: The author)

I reflected on the days when we competed doing daredevil leaps into the dam, off the lofty spots on the cliffs. "We were flirting with death," I thought to myself, as I surveyed the rocky surface that spread across Popomeni**.** My body shook in fear. Often, our parents would reprimand us for hanging our clothes on the flat boulders because they laid out the maize there during the harvest seasons.

Apart from swimming, fishing was our daily pastime and a way to irk out a living. In typical youthful exuberance, we would, each time we hauled the nets brimming with fresh fish gasping for life out of the water, break into song and dance, celebrating our bountiful catch. Only when the trees cast their shadows across the river would we retreat to our home to savour our harvest.

The place we called it Sutwane, but the Afrikaner farmers called it Sedan. The river was Mosukudutsi to us but Brandboontjiesriver to them. Most of the farmers, if not all, spoke

our language, Khelobedu (a dialect of the Sepedi language) with impressive fluency. In fact, Khelobedu was their *lingua franca*. They called just about everything on the farm by that language – except the land and the river.

There were two places neighbouring Sutwane; Makgobole to the southwest and Mantsho to the northeast. (see the map on page 118) To the farmers, Makgobole was Morgenrood and Mantsho was Vaalwater. Occasionally, because we were intrigued by their *klanke* sounding language, when we were lucky to be near their children, we tried to speak to them in Afrikaans. This was frowned upon by their parents at the first attempt. Even so, they hardly spoke in Afrikaans in front of us. That is, if they ever spoke their language among themselves. It was disappointing and confusing. That was many, many years ago, in the early 1970s, to be precise. We were young. Just children.

There was not a single crèche or school there. As far as the Afrikaner farmers were concerned, formal education was an anathema for farm dwellers – a privilege and right exclusively reserved for white people. Often in midweek mornings, our parents would command us to come with them to the farm to carry out errands. A kombi ferrying the farmers' children to school in town (Duiwelskloof) would come our way. Then we would wait by the roadside, as if in a guard of honour formation. As the kombi approached us, we would wave at the children while screaming, to draw their attention.

If they waved back, we would leap up in the air and slap our palms against each other, elated that our friendliness had been reciprocated. To us, there was something otherworldly about the children of the Afrikaner farmers. Sometimes they simply turned their heads towards us impassively. Then, those among us who had cheered at them the most would be subjected to scorn and ridicule.

Now, in the winter of 2020 – more than four decades later – I was back on the farm. The socio-political landscape of South Africa had changed so much. No more was the country under a segregationist, white minority rule. The region had shed its vestiges of apartheid; and the provincial name of the (Northern Transvaal) and that of its capital city

(Pietersburg) were extinct. And so was the name TPA, which used to adorn the ubiquitous bright orange overalls of municipal workers. Vanished without trace.

The nearest town had also shed its uncanny name of Duiwelskloof; and it was now called Modjadjiskloof, named after Queen Modjadji. The days of the sixpences, shillings, pennies and pounds were no more, and South Africa had gone local with its currency. The times, they were a changing. Inexorably. Everything felt different. Only the ownership of the land remained largely the same. It is still theirs. The land.

Jambren was no more, having died in 1996. His son, Kaspaas, had joined him in eternal peace, if that is what self-proclaimed Christians like the Afrikaner farmers believed. The farm was now partitioned.



Figure 22. The tombstones of Jambren and his wife, Veronica Irleen Pohl at Montina Farm outside Modjadjiskloof. (Photo: The author)

One portion was owned by Jambren's younger sister, Mariah Ramona Pohl-Short, while the other belonged to his grandson Eugene "Jupie" Pohl (Kaspaas's son). To the north, Mantsho (Vaalwater) was owned by Rossi's son, Aartie "Oupa" Pohl, while Makgobole to the south was owned by ZZ2.



Figure 23. Aartie "Oupa" Pohl (L), Rossie's son, who owns Vaalwater farm (Mantsho) and Eugene "Jupie" Pohl, Kaspaas's son, who owns a portion of Sedan farm. (Photos: The author)

For almost a week, I had been struggling to get permission to visit Sedan, ZZ2 and other farmers in the area. "Maybe it is because the farms are under the land claim, and we are among the claimants," I thought to myself, as the prospects of rejection loomed large. When, finally, permission came from Sedan and ZZ2, the decision seemed nothing short of crossing the Rubicon River for the owners. "You may come see me at 9 o'clock tomorrow. Only thirty minutes!" commanded Jupie Pohl.

The night before, I dreamt of Sedan and all the things that I did with my siblings and other children. Apart from the occasional swimming and fishing, I also dreamt about us scouring the thick bushes, attracted by the allure of berries and other sumptuous wild fruits. During our expeditions, I saw troops of monkeys, performing dazzling daredevil stunts and incredible agility as they leapt from one tree branch to another.

Fascinated, I smiled in my sleep. But my mood changed when I saw something that was upsetting about these cunning creatures. It was during the harvest season, and I saw myself and my siblings in the mealie-fields, beating empty tins with sticks to scare off the monkeys from feasting from the crops. In that moment, I struck my wife Mpho with my hand so hard that she jumped out of bed and yelled at me. "What the hell is it with you!" she charged. "Are you possessed by the devil? I think you need your demons exorcised."

But now I was not dreaming. Mosukudutsi River lay before me, resplendent as it winded its way silently from the indefinite distance in the south to the east, towards Vaalwater. As it approached Pipa Mountain that bordered Vaalwater from Ga-Maphalle village, it gently curved to the north-westly direction, then to the north as if it were deliberately avoiding the barren villages of Bolobedu. Then it merged with Koedoesrivier that flowed through ZZ2 farm, as it headed northwards once more, ultimately marrying with the Letaba River near Giyani as it headed towards the Greater Letaba River in the Kruger National Park.

However, Mosukudutsi was a shadow of the river I knew. During rainy seasons, it used to swirl and roar violently that it would burst its banks and flood the surrounding valleys. A freshly dug borehole on the riverbed was a poignant reminder of just how the dearth of rain had reduced the once mighty river to this pitiful state. Dry, barren, and lifeless, it was bereft of bountiful fish it used to yield. It was hauntingly beautiful, yet menacingly intimate.

I wanted to leave the farm and go to the site that was once our family homestead, but father stood rooted to the spot. Silently. He pointed to a spot near the riverbank and reminded me that it was the scene of one of the most tragic incidents on the farm. One of the residents, Mack Mamorobela died there when the wall of soil collapsed on to him while he and other farm labourers were digging a trench to build a wall for water catchment.

Father had not been to the farm since he last fled back to Johannesburg in 1976. He had made it clear the day the day before our visit that we needed to spend as much time as we could at our ancestral home. He had arrived at my home 30 minutes ahead of our scheduled departure time. After about 15km, just before the offramp to Modjadjiskloof, we came across a sharp turn off to a gravel road that leads to Sedan.

“These must be Jambren’s grandchildren,” I said to my father, upon seeing the surname of the contact persons next to one of the advertisement boards on the side of the gravel road.



Figure 24. The gravel road leading to Sedan farms, off the R81 road from Giyani to Polokwane (Photos: The author)

A further 2km drive and we had reached a boom gate that was the access to Sedan farm. The guard lets us in without the mandatory security checks. Ahead was an expanse of sloping plains rolling into each other and interspersed with lush green crops fields. My heart began to pound, and I felt frissons of anxiety as our Toyota Hilux bakkie rumbled over the road. We came to a stop at a packhouse, which was to be my meeting place with Jupie Pohl.



Figure 25. The packhouse at Sedan farm, which is owned by the Pohl family. (Photo: The author)

About 200 metres away stood a similar structure that stood like a monolith. “That is the old shed,” said father, as we walked away from the one that had sprung up. Father looked lost, in contemplative silence.

Thoughts of my grandfather (Ramphaka William Seale) striding around the packhouse as he watched over the farmworkers going through their daily work routines raced through my mind. Grandfather had been the chief supervisor on the farm, and he was aptly named Foreman. Short and sturdy, with an affable yet strict demeanour, he commanded a lot of respect among the farm dwellers and his masters alike. And most importantly, there was a discernible aura of royalty about him. He was the last of the family patriarchs under whose traditional leadership the land was dispossessed from the community in the 1930s.

I imagined my mother standing before the conveyer belt filled with tomatoes, which she selected and packed in the small boxes – a task she performed with the dexterity that endeared her to the farmers. I then remembered that it was precisely because of her skills in packing fruits and vegetables that the farmers kept coming for her at the village after we had left the farm. Then I thought about the fact that for all her devotion and passion, she had nothing to show for the years of indefatigable toil and relentless devotion.

Suddenly, my late uncle Wilson’s words about the land claim returned to me, sending me on another guilt trip. I remembered his last words, before he died in 2013. The more I saw the land, the more I thought about him and other elders in our community who have joined our ancestors. I looked up in the sky, but I could only see images of him fleeting in the clouds with his intense, accusing gaze.

The hostile 'homecoming'

Makgobole mountain (no more than a koppie) rose gently in the south-western side of Sutwane (Sedan), its slopes covered with fog from the top to the base. It stood like a silent witness to our 'homecoming', watching over as father and I waited for Jupie Pohl, the son of Kaspaas and the grandson of Jambren. It was as if the entire Seale ancestry had converged on the mountain, watching every move we made as we surveyed the land while waiting for our host.

A white 4X4 bakkie screeched to a halt, and a young, stout man came out of it. It was Jupie (in the photo below). I was eager to get his views about the land reform process in South Africa and if he had any recollections of the Seale family, who were the rightful owners of the land he was living and farming on. A quick exchange of pleasantries, some chuckles in between as I teased him about his trademark Boer outfit, and we got into the thick and the depth of the land conundrum. For the better part of the interview, he spoke in Khelobedu language but occasionally switched to that and English.



Figure 26. Eugene 'Jupie' Pohl, the son of Kaspaas Pohl and grandfather of Jambren. He owns a portion of the two portions of land on Sedan farm. (Photo: The author)

"Yes, land reform should be done, but that must be in a sustainable way," he said. "The person who claims the land must be given a title deed and after ten, five, or thirty years, if he doesn't want to use the land, he should be allowed to sell. It must be a choice."

As he continued, he became agitated. A sense of apprehension mixed with exasperation was evidently reaching a crescendo in his voice. “Right now, I am left with a small piece of land, yet they are claiming it. Do you believe it is right or not? I am not from another country; I am Afrikaner and from South Africa. It’s the place I was born in, I live here. There is nowhere I am going. My father, my grandfather and my great-great grandfather lived here, I know this place. I speak Sotho better than English; I am not going anywhere.”

He paused, then returned to his earlier assertion. “This tiny place where I live, they have claimed it; so, where I am supposed to go? I was born here, I give people work, I don’t bother anyone.” There was a discernible emphasis on the word ‘sell’, and I could not help but sense, in the way he said it, that it was *fact accompli* that selling was the only viable option for those who wanted their land returned. I knew what he meant: *It was not a black man’s thing, this business of farming.*

“I love farming, it’s our passion. There are others who want to go to university, some who want to work at the bank, fly an aeroplane, and those who want to be engineers. If they give such persons a farm, what will they do with it?” Jupie’s words remind me of my mother. For a moment, I fell silent. It was as if I was hearing her voice and not Jupie’s. “Other people have taken money, but you still don’t have your land because you insist on trying to get it back. What will you do with it? What do you know about farming?”

Now, here was Jupie – a young man who was not born when my parents, relatives and other elders in the community were forced off their land– echoing the same sentiment. I felt an intense revulsion and exasperation. I asked him if he remembered that I was a member of the community that had claimed the land. His response was terse. “I don’t’ know them, they brought a paper but it’s long time ago.”

I was left to ponder about the protracted delays in resolving our land claim and the role of the land claims commission in that. I then asked Jupie if he had compassion for the families whose land was dispossessed, and the fact that their claim was taking too long to be resolved while they are stuck in barren villages. “I do feel pity for them, but even the soil is good that side. There are dams, and the soil is very good.”

I interjected: “Supposing the soil was good, but there is no water.” Again, Jupie’s response was telling. “They are supposed to drill water, and the government can help them.” I then asked him about compliance with the Labour Relations Act, due to the fact that government had in 2012 fined his father (Kaspaas) R28 million for not complying with the newly promulgated labour regulations. He sounded unperturbed.

“Yes, we comply. The Department of Labour does come here for inspections. But what I want to ask is, what about those who work at the villages and earn less than R50 or R60 (a day)? Their employers don’t pay the minimum wage, yet they trade with us at the same market. Why are they targeting us more?” As I understood his responses, he was referring to the small scale farmers in the villages. Most of them were retired employees in the commercial farms but had found conditions difficult to sustain their farming business, largely because the boreholes they drilled did not yield enough water, among the other factors.

I thanked Jupie and made my way back to the packhouse, where our bakkie was parked, A torrent of tormenting and debilitating questions raced through my mind. So, it was God who bequeathed the land to Jupie, his parents, and ancestors. The villagers were literally lazy and sat idle on fertile tracts of land, almost in the same manner that indigenous people sat on the land teeming with gold before the white colonialists arrived in South Africa. It could well be argued that they were living a primordial life, maintaining peace with nature. Barring the hunting of wild animals and chopping trees, they did not want to disturb mother nature.

I was eager to see whatever remained of the structures that used to be our houses on the farm, but so much had changed on the farm that it was easy to lose one’s way. It was not just the new packhouse that had sprung up, but rather the entire farm landscape looked different. The hectares of mealie fields had given way to oranges and naartjies (Afrikaans word for soft, loose skinned orange or tangerine), and there were also red and green peppers and butternuts. “Maybe it is because these crops were not as labour intensive as tomatoes, and the labour tenancy system that gave the farmers unfettered exploitation of labour had been done away with,” I thought, as we moved deeper into the farm.

Manifestation of authoritarian enclaves and democratic despotism

As we headed in the direction of what used to be the main farmhouse, we walked past the dam that my father helped to construct, across Mosukudutsi River. It was a shadow of the dam we knew and was now overpopulated with patches of grass and shrubs. Along the way, a few metres from what used to be the main farmhouse, we were approached by a white man in a bakkie. He introduced himself as George Short, the owner of the property and the husband of Maria Ramona Pohl-Short, who is Jambren's younger sister. His tone was confrontational, and he sounded uneasy about our presence on the farm.

Once we had introduced ourselves and explained the purpose of our visit to the farm, he commanded us to follow him to the farmhouse. No sooner had we settled down than George stated matter-of-factly that our land claim had been thrown out of court. He said this was as a result of the evidence that the claimants had presented, claiming that they had worked on the farm for fifty years without pay. "So, the big thing is, it was thrown out of court by the land commission, which is right," he said. "You can't tell a lie."

This was news to me, and we were taken aback and confused. I found his assertions strange because we had never received any such correspondence from the commission, whatsoever. In fact, the RLCC continued to respond to our queries about the lack of progress in our claim, and even made further promises to avail themselves for a meeting with the land claim committee to no avail.

Of course, we knew that farm owners had, in their opposing papers, claimed that there was no evidence that the Seales existed as a community and that that there was neither any labour tenancy on the farms nor dispossession of any community or person whatsoever on the farms since 19 June 1913.

As for George, our land claim was nothing short of an unwarranted act of provocation. There was so much simmering, yet insidious anger in his voice, so much so that I could not help noticing traits of a narcissist, petulant old man in him. What I found particularly absurd was his assertion that the land claim was dismissed because the claimants said they had worked for fifty years without pay. No one had put forward such information, and it was the most ludicrous thing I heard.

As George continued with what now looked like a monologue, I noticed that his face was turning pale and fierce. His voice grew so loud that it was only matched by the clink of cutlery from the kitchen teeming with his half-a-dozen maids.

“I am not interested in anything like that (the land claim); this property I can prove it was bought by me. It was bought before me, it was bought by my father-in-law, it was bought by other people, I got even the records,” he said. He went as far as to say that his ancestors acquired the land during the Anglo-Boer war, as compensation for their participation in the war. “I am not fighting anybody; I am just saying what is the law and is right.”

Just like Jupie, George invoked God to emphasise his point. He went as far as to suggest that the land claimants will face retributive justice. “I am Christian, and a lot of people don’t believe in God, and they don’t believe in Jesus Christ, so let it be! They will be standing in front of the judgement of God one day. I have only been good to people.”

After a while, he invited Maria to join in. Her speech is shaky, and her arms tremble so much that she can hardly hold a cup of tea or glass of water. As she sank down onto the chair, George explained that she suffers from malignant tumour. My father, who until then had been silent, sprung back to life. “I know you very well, you are Jambren’s sister. I am Wellington Seale, the elder son of Ramphaka Seale.”

There was a brief silence, and Mariah shook her head and then mumbled some monosyllables in Afrikaans. “Hoekom besoek die mense, wat soeke hulle by die plaas? (Why are these people visiting? What do they want on the farm)?” was all I could hear. “It’s land claims,” said George. “It was chucked out of court, and now they want to do it again! “You are a Seale, your father here is a Seale, and the whole thing was done through the Seales.”

Maria shook her head and asked to be excused. I then asked George what his thoughts are about land reform, tenure, redistribution and restitution. At the first mention of the word ‘land reform’, he cut in. “And what happened to the prominence in reporting from 1913?” he asked, in a reference to the Natives Land Act of 1913. “We never, neither my father-in-law, nor Jambren ever chased anybody away from this farm. They left on their own,” he

said, adding that the government at the time had given blacks more land stretching all the way to the Kruger National Park up to the whole of Letaba district.

“There is only about 8 percent that belongs to white (European) origin. Now, you people want to take away that too… I was born here; my father and my mother and my grandparents were born here. I never in my life ever stole from anybody… I am not going to sacrifice all my sweat and blood that I put in this country.”

Although George, like Eugene, claimed that there was nothing wrong with land reform, he was adamant that the government should blame the British and not the Afrikaners. “They mustn’t come with lies. The government and all the people who are anti-Boer, mustn’t be anti-Boer. They must be anti-British; they are the ones who gave the land to us after the Anglo Boer war. They must go to the British, to the UK.”

Incidentally, or rather inadvertently, he affirmed our land claim evidence when he said it was Mrs. Dora Graham who had bought the land. “Bought the land from who?” I asked him. “Just because you were born there doesn’t mean you are the owner of it. Now you must remember I have paid for that, not illegally. Legally,” he said.

As we bade him farewell, he seemed determined to remind us that our land claim had been thrown out of court. This time, there was something malignantly unpleasant about the way he went about it. It was more than cynicism; it sounded mocking and sinister. “They know how to look at a person and if he is telling a lie, like it happened in this case of the Seales. They said they were never paid for 50 years. Now, that is impossible. When they said before the judge or the land claims officer, he even laughed.”

I felt as if the soft earth beneath my feet was about to crumble. Every breath I drew hurt. It is only fair to dispute something if your rights, or rather privileges, get threatened, but George’s impertinent response to our claim was disturbing in many respects. I thought about that day, when my uncles Wilson, Isaac and other elders in the community travelled all the RLCC offices in Polokwane to register the land claim. Excitement was etched on their faces as we drove back home, and there was anticipation all around. Now, more than two decades, here was George, mocking our land claim.

A deep sense of repugnance assailed me that I wanted an escape from my state of torment. I could only think of the site that used to be our homestead. I yearned for the old days when we played around our family homestead until late in the afternoon and chased butterflies before sunset. Or idling on wooden bridges watching ducks gliding in water and eagles hovering over dams hunting fish before they swooped on their preys.

I imagined myself seeing my grandfather's enormous Chevrolet bakkie parked under the large tree in front of our family compound. In there, I saw farm dwellers and labourers from Sedan and neighbouring farms savouring the sorghum beer that we sold. Men and women were quaffing the beer while gyrating to the African beats, blaring from the gramophone. Occasionally, they enjoyed the sumptuous bread buns that my mother baked in the makeshift oven on the ground, to augment her meagre income. But everything on the farm looked so strange that it was not easy finding our way to our 'home'.

Razed to the ground

We headed back to the packhouse to ask for directions. An elderly man, who said he had known the Seales very well as he had lived with them on the land offered to lead the way. "Why is he still on the farm?" I asked my father, as I thought about the evidence by a black farm worker in the affidavit that the farmers had filed in opposition of the land claim.

About a kilometre from the packhouse, we were able to spot the route leading to our home. We passed the area that used to be the home of the Mamorobela family. There were no traces of their home structures. As we approached the section that used to be our home, I became anxious, overwhelmed with a sense of anticipation. Images of the old structures of houses floated in my mind. From a distance, I saw nothing. Nothing. Just a long stretch of tall, dry grasses.



Figure 27. A portion of land that used to be Ramphaka Seale's mielie field on Sedan farm. At the top right is the tree that is located near the site where the family homestead was located. (Photo: The author)

We alighted from the car and moved closer. There were no traces of our family homestead. Everything had been razed to the ground, with no trace. So much had changed from the time we visited the farm with officials from the land claim commission for verification purposes.

I imagined watching the demolition crew – with their graders rolling in. I saw a thick cloud of dust floating around the walls crumbled down until all that remained of my childhood home was mounds and mounds of rubble. Everything was destroyed and ripped apart – effectively wiped out from the map of the farm. Extinct. I was mortified, and as it were, torn asunder that I felt a felt a sharp, piercing pain in my chest.

We spotted a cleared spot among the patches of grass. I then recalled that recently, in June 2020, some of our relatives had been to the farm to try and pay homage to my great-grandmother, Mmathomu Seale, who was Ramphaka's mother. The task of identifying the gravesite had proved difficult, so they just cleared whatever spot they thought was the closest and performed their rituals there.



Figure 28. Motlhatlego Wellington Seale at the site that was once the homestead of the Seale family on Sedan farm. (Photos: The author)

Then it was time to go. To go back *home* to the village. Father got into the car. I remained standstill, rooted to the spot. My gaze wandered all over the fields and plains, then across the river and to the mountains. I thought about Jambren, the once revered landlord on the farm. I could not reconcile why he was so liked among the farm community, least of all by my mother and most of our relatives.

I remembered that one black family at Sedan farm (one of Jambren's three farms) saw nothing amiss when the Afrikaner farmers named their son Basie (short for Baas). His family and relatives continued to call him by that name long after they had moved to the village. When the son started school, the teacher who 'adopted' him changed his name to Thabo, but the name Basie had stuck indelibly.

Then it was time for father and me to go. The car was about 30 metres away but walking there was a painful trudge. I opened the door and sunk into the seat. Off we drove back to back home. To the village.

Welcome to the Agrarian Republic

The enlightened, shrewd farmer

The insatiable quest to join the land ownership dots gathered momentum, in spite of the discourteous encounter with George Short. It was late in the afternoon when father and I made our way out of Sedan farm to the village. The sun peered through the clouds, occasionally dappling the plains with golden shafts of light. But the clouds hung stubbornly above, casting long shadows over the landscape. It was hours since our encounter with George, but his words still echoed in my head like a discordant drumbeat.

"I was born here; my father and my mother and my grandparents were born here. I never in my life ever stole from nobody… I am not going to sacrifice all my sweat and blood that I put in this country… They mustn't come with lies." He had proceeded to say*: "Just because you were born there doesn't mean you are the owner of it. Now you must remember, I have paid for that, not illegally. Legally."*

Confusion and anger assailed me. I clenched my fists and bit my lower lip, unable to reconcile the conceited views that were so laden with untruths, so much that they reeked of the ignorance of an arrogant denialist. Jupie too was not far off from George's worldview. My eyes wandered far ahead into the distant horizon, hoping to see a silver lining among the thick clouds. But the sky mocked me with its impassive gloominess.

We spotted a pack of jackals roaming along the fields, just as we were approaching Makgobole mountain. Suddenly, a clan of hyenas appeared, displaying a domineering pose. They looked poised to attack any resistance to their impromptu occupation of the territory. Terrified, the jackals scurried off. As they approached the last stretch of the verdant tracks teeming with impalas and springboks, the jackals slowed to a brief stop and looked back in envy. Then they darted away. Left alone, the hyenas wagged their tails as they converged around the land, in a triumphant mood.

I was due to meet Tickie Pohl (Kaspaas's younger brother) and the Van Zyl brothers, Philly and Tommy van Zyl, the moguls of ZZ2 farm, on the following day. The family are a descendant of "Willem van Zyl from the Netherlands, who worked as a fresh produce

farmer for the Dutch East India Company in the Cape of Good Hope", according to information on the company's website. "Willem was fired in 1702 due to insubordination (and) bought a farm in Franschhoek… His descendants left the Cape during the 1830s and gradually moved to the north (and) eventually settled in the region east of Polokwane in 1880" (www.zz2.co.za: ND.) The family had in recent years acquired most of the commercial farms around the Mooketsi valley whose owners were financially struggling.

At night, I wrestled with many thoughts that I tossed and turned in bed. I was tormented by the slow pace it was taking to resolve our land. Not only did I find myself fixated at the way the Van Zyl brothers had become so powerful in the region, but I was also preoccupied with their flirtations with powerful politicians and the palm-itching traditional leaders. I recalled that there was a statue of Nelson Mandela that adorned the entrance to ZZ2 farm. I wondered if they were not the gold standard for the corporatisation of land reform and if, because of their track record in farming, they were not part of the reason our land claim had stalled.

Then it was daybreak, which brought relief to my latest spell of irrevocable agonising over the lost land and land claim. It was just after 11am as I took a detour from the R36 Polokwane – Modjadjiskloof Road at Mooketsi, into the gravel road leading towards the headquarters of ZZ2 in Mooketsi. About 100 metres from the tar road is a boom gate manned by a bevy of security guards. Just a few years ago, the road used to be a public road. Not anymore.

Now it is a private property, and there is no free passage to the agrarian republic of ZZ2. Just before the boom gate is the national flag of South Africa, fluttering along that of ZZ2 – an ironic symbol of a shared sovereignty. The flags were just one of the many shrewd jingoistic charades and facades that I came across about the company.



Figure 29: The road leading to ZZ2 near Mooketsi, along the main road between Pokokwane and Modjadjiskloof (Photos: The author*).*

After I revealed the identity of my host on the farm, the guards were in awe and wonder. As I drove through the gate, they gave me an impromptu guard of honour and salute. About a 7km drive along the gravel road, I finally arrived at ZZ2. My usher, who had missed me at the tar road, soon arrived and briskly led me to the main office. An imposing, larger-than-life statue of Nelson Mandela stood just metres away from the main entrance.



Figure 30. Farm shrine: Tommy Van Zyl, the chief executive of ZZ2 at the firm's headquarters in Mooketsi, On the right is the statue of Nelson Mandela, at the front of the farmhouse. (Photos: The author)

“You will meet the company CEO, Tommy Van Zyl,” said my usher, a young man of Arab descent. Once in the office, the pleasantries included Tommy’s recollections of my late uncles Wilson and Isaac’s tenure on the farm. “Isaac was a keen observer. Wilson expressed himself and was modern. He was more assertive, interpreting things around him. He could see the phenomenon and make sense of it.”

And so, the interview begun. Before I knew, it had become a lecture that moved from the political economy of farming, philosophy, and the art of leadership. Names such as Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Socrates and Aristotle were thrown into the mix. Tommy, it seemed, was not an ordinary run-of-the-mill farmer. There was a touch of sophistication about him, and he infused his knowledge of farming with an understanding of national politics.

“Can any company, let alone a farming enterprise founded on the principles of colonialism and land dispossession, erect the statue of such a global icon? This is also what locals generally think about ZZ2?” I asked Tommy once the acquaintances had been completed. Tommy was unperturbed. “I was thinking, we have a corrupt society and if we can have a symbol of pure leadership, somebody can be inspired. So, we made this symbol of Nelson Mandela,” he explained, adding that the statue is surrounded with the four cardinal values of the Roman empire: prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude.

A flurry of questions raced through my mind. Did the Van Zyls follow legal process in erecting the Madiba statue? Does this not amount to the devaluation of the brand Mandela? I pressed Tommy for answers. He was unmoved. As far as he was concerned, everything was beyond reproach. “I checked with the Nelson Mandela Foundation and with legal people… There was no legal problem with it, so long as you don’t make money out of it… This is for all of us.”

I shifted the focus to the main issue: land reform. Tommy acknowledged that what has been dubbed the “original sin” (land dispossession) was committed in South Africa, but yet again, he waxed philosophical. “The land issue is a global issue; it’s not restricted to South Africa alone… It’s a phenomenon even with the holier than thou countries, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South America, and the United States of America.”

I directed the focus to matters closer to home in South Africa. “Now, we are not taking about the past, we are talking about the present and the future. Populism is the new norm, or normal; for the same reason that Donald Trump (former USA president) is such a powerful person, you have here Julius Malema. He is an African Trump. Is that (Malema’ views about land reform) going to bring prosperity to Africa? If Trump brings prosperity to America, Malema might bring prosperity to Africa.”

The expropriation without compensation and concomitantly radical economic transformation mantra were clearly causing much consternation in the Van Zyls. “Now if you ask me with my experience of the situation (as someone) living in the hotspot of land issues what the solution is”, said Tommy, “my belief is that it is definitely a populist solution. If you want a concept of that nature, go and look at what happened in Zimbabwe. Go and look at what happened in Venezuela. If you want another, go to Mexico. There’s very good example of what happens if you need an imprudent solution.”

With that, Tommy delved further in the problems afflicting South Africa’s land reform programme. “South Africa’s foundations are very strong, in terms of the constitution. Execution is the problem. The answer is twofold, in terms of land reform. The one is, land restitution, which by implication is a legal process. You say, ‘I have taken your land’; then the facts have to speak. The judge from an independent judiciary, with a very careful consideration, has to make a pronouncement. If you don’t like it you may appeal, (and) even go to the constitutional court.”

He paused and gulped some water. “If you look at how the situation has been managed in South Africa, that (legal principle) hasn’t been used. In fact, it has been abused and the state has lost a lot of money because of this haste about the emotions… Because it (land reform) has been so pressing, because people have been so disadvantaged, you can take a shortcut. And who pays for that? The government. The State of South Africa paid for frivolous land claims and the taxpayers had to pay for it. People got land which they didn’t deserve in many cases...”

His mention of the word “frivolous” reminded me that in their legal challenge of our land claim, the farmers had used that expression. I felt as if it was a jibe aimed at me.

Tommy continued:

“The bigger issue is that I have land, and here comes the land claim commissioner, and I am in trouble financially. I elevate the price two, three times the normal value, and he (land commissioner) buys it. There is enough claim (where) even the land claims commissioner and his officials got back-hands from this owner. They share some of the spoils, post the settlement. The community has the land with no resources. That community now (fits) the narrative of failed land restitution.”

Clearly, the Van Zyls are acutely aware of how the land reform matter has been infiltrated by avaricious state officials. Tommy was now striking the right chord in me that I forgot that ZZ2 now occupies some of the land that belongs to our community. “If the corruption is so structural and endemic, where do you start? You can reform small transgressions, but you can’t reform one big. If they start managing the land reform process, we will save lot of money.”

With that, he briefly returned to the legal imperatives of land reform but subtly moved beyond it to refer to his forebodings. “In the final analysis, the legalistic solution is as strong as its acceptance by everybody in its fairness and rationality. A lot of people want to rely on the constitution as the backbone. But I am looking at it beyond the constitution, in terms of the future of South Africa, and what brings capital to the country. We can with legal recourse try to say, what builds trust? But we can, in the final analysis, try other alternatives. If capital is gone, you won’t recover.

“The second thing is (managing) legitimate and fair expectations. Who decides on that? If I look at some of the people who shouts the loudest, I can’t reconcile. Post that, the capital is gone. If that is the route that our leaders are taking us, some of our skills will be lost… The white population is shrinking. Many people are emigrating… We would like to be part of the solution.

"If you go to the workers, would you rather work in the system of ZZ2, farmers, electricians, technicians, engineers on civil and industrial matters, economists, IT specialists – a whole range of skills and abilities – all that together, builds a system that produces primary agricultural food. It's like a termite hill, where everybody works together."

As we bade each other goodbye, he remarked, without mentioning the other farms, that Sedan belongs to the Seales. On my way, while I set off to meet Tickie Pohl, I pondered over the interview with Tommy. Were his views about land reform a sort of opportunistic sophistry; a subtle reasoning that sounds correct but is deceptive? I grappled with this for a long time, unable to reconcile the paradoxes.

When land reform stokes existential fear



Figure 31. Mauritz Jean 'Tickie' Pohl
(Photo: The author)

"It's not that I don't like owning land. What I am scared of is the EFF (Economic Freedom Fighters. It (sic) will make confusion and collapse production…"

With this remark about the fears of land reform, and specifically expropriation without compensation, Tickie leaned back in the seat of his white 4X4 Toyota Hilux bakkie.

The setting was a roadside at Jachpadt junction along the R81 Road, about five 6km from a house at ZZ2, where he lives at his daughter's matrimonial home. Tickie does not have a farm or house of his own, something odd for an Afrikaner farmer in the Letaba-Mooketsi, because the greatest thing that apartheid and white privilege could gift to the Afrikaner brethren was land. While at Sedan, especially in the 1970s, he was the most powerful of Jambren's children and the second in command on the farm after Kaspaas.

When Kaspaas bought Montina farm in the early 1980s, he went to work with him. After Kaspaas's demise in 2015, he was left homeless and landless. The fact that he did not have a farm of his own, let alone a home, made my mother sad. Such was sadness that she would at every opportunity phone him to express her concern, asking him why he was landless when his father had owned such big land.

Now, here I was meeting him for the first time since our family were forced off our farm in 1977. Like most of the farmers in the region, Tickie is fluent in Khelobedu, a dialect of Sepedi. "When I was at school, the teachers phoned my mother to say 'you must teach your child to speak Afrikaans' because I was speaking Sotho. They said they 'did not know what he was saying'," Tickie said, once we settled for the interview inside his bakkie.

He is full of apprehension about South Africa's land reform conundrum. "You see, the old (apartheid) laws were pleasing. We were working in pleasure, not this thing of forging politics. The politics won't give you food. The moment we fail production, we will fail a big test. Not just a small test, but a big one because then we will talk war and it won't come right. I am not against land reform; I am not saying it's wrong. just be careful not to disturb production."

I asked him if he knew about the Seales' land claim. "I heard about it; George (Short) told me. This claim date back from 1998, it's long. But why do they claim (the land) because the farm was bought by a woman, all the way to Skeidin (a farm adjacent to Sedan)? Mrs. Graham was the owner of these lands. Thununu (Tickie's grandfather) became the owner who bought the land from Mrs. Graham. Then came Jambren (Tickie's father) and Rossie (Jambren's brother)." With that, he had inadvertently corroborated our version of events that it was Mrs. Graham who first came to our land and declared it hers.

I explained to him that buying the land does not necessarily mean that one is its rightful owner, because there was a community that lived there before and was forced out of the place. For a moment, he silent and then returned to his views about his fears for land reform. “Production of the country must not fail. I don’t care what they do, but if production fails, you will suffer, and you will kill each other. History of Africa shows that if you suffer from hunger, you kill each other. I don’t think they are handling it (land reform) well.”

This remark about the government’s handling of land reform left me pondering about our family’s travails in reclaiming our land. The fact that we still had nothing to show for our efforts, despite our claim being among the first to be registered during the first registration window in December 1998 was mindboggling. Given our family and community members’ struggle to lift themselves out of the morass of poverty and depravation while stuck in barren villages, acquiring the land would have made a difference in our lives.

We could not say with any measure of confidence quantify the size of the farms. In the haste to meet the land claims deadline, we gave rough estimations that defy logic and belief. We listed Makgobole at ±480 000 hectres, Sutwane ±900 000 hect, and Vaalwater ±1500 000 hect”. In our minds, however, the combined size of the farms were about the size of Soweto in Gauteng.

According to the RLCC acceptance report of our claim (see appendix 7 on page 128), however, the combined size of the farms under our land claim was about 330 hectares. This was further affirmed by one of the farmers, Aartie “Oupa” Pohl (the son of Rossi Pohl) who owns Vaalwater farm, when I phoned him in April 2020. His rough estimation was at more than 300 hectares. He is the son of the late Rossi Pohl. Supposing that the actual size of our land was indeed 330 hectares, its monetary value could be a huge relief to our family and community.

Oupa said the RLCC had in 2016, bought a farm next door to his at an amount between R25 000 and R30 000 a hectare. He would not say which farm that was. Supposing that the community were to sell the land at that value (R25 000 by 3 300 hectares amounts to R82 500 000), that could be a massive windfall for the community.

According to the Valuator Group, an enterprise that provides valuations services for land and buildings, among other assets, "the average price of a hectare of an arable land with high potential in South Africa and a high water table is estimated at R50 000". However, this has significantly dropped in recent times, because of lingering uncertainties over the country's land reform policy.

Fin24 reported in September 2018 that, "Farm prices in South Africa have plunged by a third since the ruling party decided to seek a change to the constitution to make it easier to expropriate land without compensation, and as commodity prices fell due to bumper harvests following a drought." The article quoted Johann Bornman, an economist who is the chairman of Agri Development Solutions. He utilises data from the country's Deeds Office, which maintains the property registry.

"The average price of agricultural land sold in July (2018) was R 9,318 a hectare compared with R13,700 in December (2017), when the African National Congress adopted the policy... The average price of a hectare of agricultural land is 43% lower than April 2016, when it was at a record." Yet, even with such a drop in value, that amount may be a relief for a community largely living on the margins. And considering that the community intends to lease the land and not sell, the benefits of their birthright could have a lasting positive effect for generations and generations to come."

As for Oupa, the slightest mention of land claims matters was like a blow that cut open a wound that had been festering in him. "I grew up here. My father grew up here. You can't take the land, otherwise it's (going to be) a *nyimbi* (a Xitsonga word for war). Do you know what a *nyimbi* is?"

Although he sounded like somebody not necessarily opposed to land reform, he was unequivocal about compensation for the property. Without mentioning the phrase expropriation without compensation, he was emphatic that a recompense was non-negotiable and that it must be done in a proper manner.

"They (land claims commission) must pay us enough money," he said, also that the R5 000 a hectare offered in 2016 was nothing more than an insult to him and other farmers. "They

said they could pay us R5 000 a hectare. That is unacceptable, because in 2016, they bought a farm next door (to mine) at an amount between R25 000 and R30 000."



Figure 32: Aartie "Oupa" Pohl, the son of Rossi Pohl. Aartie owns Vaalwater, one of the farms under our land claim. (Photo: The author)

The anger was so palpable in his voice, that he reminded me of George Short and his half-brother, Jupie Pohl. "I can't give up this land for such less. We grew up here; we will die here. It's a long time we here."

That the RLCC had approached Oupa with an offer to purchase his land was news to me. When I contacted Robert Mokgola, he too said he had only heard it from Oupa some time ago. We were surprised because we never received any communication that RLCC planned to buy the land for because as far as we know, the white farmers were still opposing our land claim and the dispute had not been resolved. More frustrating was that it usually takes long and is hard to get answers from the RLCC, which continues to fiddle, as our land claim stalls.

In the period that we have been waiting for our land claim to be resolved, we have seen farmers like ZZ2 flourishing by acquiring more and more land and growing into a multimillion conglomerate. Phil van Zyl was in 2017 quoted as saying that the company cultivates 3 500 hectares. They have also expanded into our land, as they now own the entire Morgenrood farm (Makgobole).

Trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty

“So, what did the Boers say? I hope the ZZ2 bosses were not as rude and in denial about the land as George Short. That one denies everything, and I can’t believe he thinks the land is theirs and not ours,” father said, as soon as I arrived at the village. He was sitting in the veranda, sorting seeds in preparation for the planting season. “It’s interesting that he thinks it was God who gave them the land. Whose God takes away the land from its rightful owners and give to others, especially strangers from faraway places?”

Mother, who had been sitting quietly in the kitchen, stood up and walked up to us. “Did you meet with Tickie? “Is he all fine? Did he tell you why he doesn’t have a house of his own?” Before I could explain, she commanded: “Phone him right now, I want to speak to him!”

I obliged, handing over the phone to her as soon as Tickie had answered the call. “Tickie, it’s me, Mmamodjadji Seale. How are you?... Why don’t you go and stay at your maternal grandfather’s place at the farmhouse in Sutwane? Why do you have to suffer like this when your grandfather left property for you? I will come visit you soon…” And so the talk went on for about ten minutes.

Mother’s voice was full of sadness. When she was finished speaking, she sat on a chair, her cheek sunk deep in the palm of her hand. Unless you knew the person on the other side of the line, you would have thought it was a mother grieving for her son’s misfortune. Father shook his head. He looked tired. He had spent the day at his piece of land, fortifying the fence with round poles and thin wires. The sapping heat had taken its toll on him.

The piece of land is located on the banks of Motlatswi River at Mohlabaneng village. Its soil is so barren that it can barely yield enough crops, let alone mielies. If you stood on the elevated side overlooking the river, you would think it mocked you with its bleakness. In the words of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o “… it was red, rough, and sickly.”



Figure 33. Wellington Motlhatlego Seale at his piece of land at Mohlabaneng village in Bolobedu, in Limpopo Province. (The author)

After some time, dark clouds started forming above, swirling rapidly like boiling water in the sky. The threat of potent thunderstorms ramping up loomed large. A blinding bolt of lightning flashed, followed by a crash of thunder. Residents scampered in all directions, desperate to take cover from the imminent storm. Some 20 minutes later, strong winds started blowing, lashing the village with sand and all manner of debris. Soon, the winds receded, and everything quietened.

One of the neighbours who used to work with my mother on the white men's farms came into the yard. She was visibly agitated. "I thought it was going to rain this time around," she said, to which mother replied: "I thought so too. We no longer know what it will take for the rain to come. Whatever it is that we have done to offend the gods, it must be such serious a curse. We will all die of this heatwave."

It was the third year in succession that there had not been good rains at the village. In the last two years, it would rain heavily for a day or two in Spring, raising hopes among the villagers, so much so that they sprang into action and started preparing seeds. Then it would be hot and dry all over again, drawing the life from their hopes. As author and

feminist Olive Schreiner would have put it, “man and beast turned their eyes to the pitiless sky, that like the roof of some brazen oven arched overhead”.

Mother had made it a habit to invoke her past experiences on the farm for every slightest misfortune at the village. On this occasion, when the clouds again flattered to deceive, her nostalgia was unmistakable. “I miss the good old days on the farm, not this hot and dry place. We had plenty of water and food, and life was good. It was not as hot as here, and we were living peacefully and gracefully.”

As usual, she made sure she was not done until she had reminded everyone that leaving the farm had never been her option. “I never imagined myself leaving the farm. It was Motubasha (her late friend) who insisted, saying, ‘if you remain behind, the Boers will kill you’. So, I too left. I was sad because I had to leave some of my goods behind. My chickens too, which died. More than forty of them.”

She turned around and looked at my father. “Where is your so-called magical rain making powers in all of this? Isn’t it you and other relatives of yours like to remind all and sundry that you are part of the Modjadji Royal House?” mother asked, in a coldly mocking tone. “If I had the strength, I would go work there.”

Stolen innocence

I hated hearing my mother’s nostalgia about Sedan, because it reminded me of the hardships I endured while living and working on white people’s farms. My first experience was in 1978, when I was in Standard 1 (present-day Grade 3) at my maternal grandparents’ home at Ga-Mamaila Kolobe-Tona village, in the Sekgosese subdistrict. I was shipped there because there was not a single crèche or school at Sedan farm.

It was during the winter school vacations, and Thununu’s truck was among those that drove through villages fortnightly to fetch whoever wanted to work on farms. For the entire day, between 6am and 5pm, we would tie tomato plants onto round poles with thin wires and threads from sisal plants to support them, as they grew taller. Sometimes we did the backbreaking task of loading or offloading crates full of tomatoes on trucks.

If daytime meant life of hardship, night-time came with its fair share of problems. We did not have a place to sleep. We found shelter in an old, disused shed. Time and again, we would be awakened by pigs snorting and snoring as they ventured into our hideouts. We would then move away to other spots, but it was almost certain that two or more pigs would encroach into our territory. After two weeks of hard labour, I was paid R1. Just one R1 for twelve days of hard labour.



Figure 34: The old R1 note, a South African currency.
(Source: www.bidorbuy.co.za)

I looked closely at the shiny piece of paper, fascinated by the elaborate inscriptions on it. In particular, I was intrigued by the white man with an immaculately trimmed moustache and hair so long that it was falling all over his shoulders. I covered the note with a piece of hard nylon paper and slipped it into my pocket. As I would later find out, the man was Jan van Riebeeck. I kept it for about a week before spending it. The more I kept the note, the more the picture haunted me, flitting in and out of my dreams like a ghost. Yet, the irony was that I felt I deserved more of those banknotes because what I was paid was worse than a pittance, to say the least.

My other stint was Kaspaas's Montina farm when I was in Standard 5 (Grade 7), when I was staying at Mohlabaneng village. I was among the group of boys tasked with watering tomatoes through furrow irrigation. Once the foreman opened the valve on the dam, the water would gush out of the pipes and come rushing in a canal. We would then direct it into tributaries of furrows leading to the tomato plants, using spades.

If the unremitting surge spurted out of the furrow walls and flooded the plants, we were in for a hiding. It was such a laborious and tiring job. That we were young did not no matter, and the Boers were determined to extract as much of our labour as they could. The legal foundations of slavery might have been abolished but for us, the practices persisted.

For most of the time as we toiled, the foreman would take cover from the searing heat under a tree. If he saw the Baas's car approaching, he would stand up and run towards us, barking all manner of instructions. One day, he appeared to nod off that he did not hear Kaspaas's bakkie approaching. As the 'baas' drove past the fields, the foreman bolted out of his shade and came running towards us. "What did they wanted, what did they wanted?" he asked, in rather broken English. Once the car was out of sight, he retreated to the shade and slouched on the soft grass.

Sometimes we slept on the farm. If we were taking shelter in a maize barn, we slept inside the small building that housed a big water pumping machine. That was a jarring experience, more so when you were young. In her research paper entitled *We Cry For Our Land*, author and researcher Wendy Davies notes that "farm labour in South Africa is particularly exploitative and anachronistic."

"…Farmworkers – with few exceptions – remain entirely at their employers' mercy... Poverty wages, long hours, sub-standard accommodation, and exposure to dangerous machinery and chemicals are all commonplace, and workers' problems are compounded by having little or no education, and very little help from outside."

She further writes that, "few (farm owners) make any provision for seasonal or casual workers, who are normally housed in sheds, outhouses or barns for weeks or months on end, or are obliged to construct their own shelters or sleep in the open".

Final reflections: From the Valley of Hope to the Mountain Peaks of Despair

On a midsummer Sunday afternoon, after the festive season and new year merriments, I left the village and embarked on the customary long jaunt to my workplace and second home in faraway lands of Johannesburg. As the car rambled on, it pushed trees on both sides of the road to the opposite direction to where I was coming from. Everything moved backwards at rapid speed. As I stared ahead on the long, straight stretch of the road, I saw shiny marks that looked like water. The waterspouts kept appearing ahead, only to reappear when I approached them. They were relentless in their flattery and deception.

I felt as if Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was watching me when he once wrote in *Weep Not, Child*:

"It was a long and broad road and shone with black tar, and when you travelled along it on hot days you saw little lakes ahead of you. But when you went near, the lakes vanished, to appear again a little farther ahead. Some people called them the devil's waters because they deceived you…"

This aptly describes the state of the Seale Tribal Land Claim. Our quest for restorative justice has been an excursion to nowhere – a backward progress through a world where hope promises so much, but in which the reality produces too little. The Seale community have become the quintessential, standing joke of South Africa's land reform programme. It is inconceivable that since the year 2005 – almost two decades since the RLCC found that our community "have a *prima facie* valid land claim…", the matter remains unresolved.

More disconcerting is that the dithering over land reform, and the fiddling by the land claims commission, and by extension the government, has continued even after the community went all the way to clear whatever impediments existed in their quest for restorative justice. The attempts by the Modjadji Tribal Council to usurp our land through a process that was effectively a counterclaim was an uncalled-for action that, although resolved, had also left a bitter taste in the community.

In the end, the reality of the betrayal hits home when discussions about South Africa's land reform arise at the local level in Bolobedu. The Seale Community are often the first to be mentioned as a typical example of **a** land claim that has apparently stalled. Indeed, the community have all but resigned themselves to the fact that the ideal of land reform will never provide the panacea that it was expected to deliver, at least as far as it relates to them. It would not be an overestimation to think that any concerned citizen wondering about the devastation wrought by a floundering land reform ideal on communities trying to lift themselves out of the morass of poverty and deprivation should not look beyond the Seale clan.

Personally, embarking on this longform research project has reaffirmed our land claim committee's long held view that the community's quest for restorative justice is being sacrificed at the altar of political expediency. It is curious that the government announced the expropriation of land without compensation in December 2018, which was literally on the eve of the May 2019 national election. The move should be seen within the context of South Africa's political powerplay: party-political manoeuvrings to sway public opinion, and ultimately, the votes – but actions that trumps truth.

As Professor Andries du Toit from PLAAS aptly puts it, the decision was a way of "outmaneuvering the Economic Freedom Fighters, forestalling its ability to criticise the governing party until the election was safely over". Ultimately, as matters stand, all the narratives of expropriation without compensation are nothing more than a charade to woo the voting public. Indeed, the adage that parody is the sincerest form of flattery finds no better resonance than in South Africa's land reform project.

The malaise often manifests itself in the political grandstanding, with politicians constantly haggling over the nature and direction that land reform should take but with no progress. For when it comes to land reform, ours is a government oscillating between the extremes of radicalism and racialism – devoid of direction, clarity, and purpose. Indeed, the land reform project in South Africa has become pitiful spectacle of truly gargantuan proportions, and which has stumbled from one policy change to another with little progress.

Not only has the government dithered over the land reform matter; the vices of avarice, corruption and cronyism have set in to, contriving to thwart communities with legitimate land claims. The vices are well documented: unscrupulous government officials and/or politicians conniving with agribusiness and/or traditional leaders to usurp the rights of community over land has become so frequent, in what has been dubbed "elite capture" of land in the report by Farai Mtero (2019) and fellow researcher at PLAAS.

The report, titled *Elite capture in land redistribution: Winners and losers,* notes that "state bureaucrats and the politically powerful often capture land resources in land reform [through] the soliciting and payment of bribes, double-dipping, fronting, the imposition of politically connected beneficiaries…"

The 2019 Special Investigating Unit report revealed, for instance, "a huge network of fraud by more than 40 people, including government officials, who orchestrated a land reform project worth hundreds of millions of rand." The looting, on a grand scale, resulted in people described as "rent-a-crowds" receiving millions of rand in land redistribution grants they were never entitled to, in what the report described as "the great land heist". That there was little progress, if any, made in prosecuting the perpetrators is inconsequential. It is all part of the quintessential South African story, less consequence for corruption, crime, and criminality.

As if that were not enough, there is the corporatisation of land reform in South Africa – "attributable to policy biases which prioritise commercial success as an overriding goal…" according to the PLAAS researchers. As a result, established fresh produce conglomerates, because of their track record in farming, are often used as bulwarks to stall the land reform process. In fact, another report by PLAAS found "evidence of elite capture and state collusion with agribusiness" in land tenures.

The report states that, "government has concluded leases with strategic partners (i.e., agribusiness companies), rather than with 'beneficiaries' themselves, who therefore neither

own the land, but remain workers on state farms, working for strategic partners." The strategic partners were identified as established farmers or representatives of large agribusiness who are mainly whites.

All the while, amid these platonic vices of politicians, the rightful owners of land remain in the mercy of the exploitative labour conditions that they escaped from. For them, the struggle for land rights is an endless episode of agony and pain. They are Oswald Mtshali's "abandoned bundle", haunted and harrowed by seeing their hopes dashed to smithereens while the traitors, having "melted into the rays of the rising sun, watch[ing] on from atop their lofty spaces with "face(s) glittering with innocence and (their) heart(s) pure as untrampled dew".

As the government continues to fiddle, my family and community are fast losing hope in their quest to reclaim our birthright. Stuck in rural enclaves, they try to eke out a living from whatever pieces of land they can find and till the soil for subsistence living.



Figure 35: Wellington Seale surveying his mielie fields at Mohlabaneg Village, Bolobedu. (Photo: The author)

Methodology

Introduction

"We live in precarious times, wafting as we are between glimmers of hope and then despair." (Plaatje: 1916)

I grew up on a farm in the Greater Letaba region, an area abundant with verdant tracts of land near Modjadjiskloof (formerly Duiwelskloof) in the Limpopo Province (formerly Northern Transvaal and later Northern Province) of South Africa. We called the land Sutwane before we were dispossessed in the 1930s during white colonial rule and renamed Sedan. It was one of the three portions of land under the chieftaincy of my great grandparents. The others were Makgobole and Mantsho, which were renamed Morgenrood and Vaalwater respectively, after dispossession (See Appendix 1). The combined size of the land was 3 300 hectares, according to the documents from the farmers opposing our land claim.

Today, vast tracts of the land are owned by the Van Zyl family, popularly known as ZZ2 – a renowned South African agricultural enterprise with farming properties in Limpopo, as well as in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng, North-West, Mpumalanga and Namibia. It is commonplace nowadays to see high-ranking politicians, including cabinet ministers, dining and wining with the Van Zyls (see Appendix 2 and 3). When Finance Minister Tito Mboweni was delivering his Medium-Term Budget Speech in March 2018, he singled out ZZ2 while warning against taking away land from commercial farmers. He said they could be "a valuable partner for the government to transform the farming sector". (Farmers Weekly: 2018).

When in 1977, after my parents and relatives were forced off their land and settled at villages in Bolobedu (under Queen Modjadji), most of them worked on farms owned by ZZ2. The conditions there were not that different from at Sedan, although the experience evoked mixed emotions. At Sedan, my grandfather, William Ramphaka Seale, had been a chief supervisor; and he was aptly nicknamed foreman. He commanded a lot of respect among the farm dwellers and his 'masters' alike; and there was a discernible aura of royalty

about him. As I would later find out, he had been the chief on the land before it was dispossessed.

For young boys like me back then (in the 1970s), life on the farm was blissful. There was no single crèche or school, and weekdays were mostly spent fishing and swimming in the dams and the ever-flowing Mosukudutsi River. Fishing was particularly fun that it became our daily pastime. If we were not swimming or fishing, we were scouring the lush bushes, attracted by the allure of berries and other wild fruits. On weekends, farm dwellers and labourers from Sedan and neighbouring farms would descend onto our family compound to savour the sorghum beer that my grandfather sold. Men and women would quaff the beer while gyrating to the African beats, blaring from the gramophone. Occasionally, they savoured the sumptuous bread buns that my mother baked in the makeshift oven on the ground, to augment her meagre income.

It is often said that youth is the age of innocence. However, even in my childhood, I could notice that beneath the façade of euphoria at Sedan lay palpable weariness and wretchedness among my parents, relatives and other community members. If their constant smiles, chatter and laughter hid the despair, their dreary, weary faces and trudges when they returned home were revealing. Their demeanor was so poignant that it did not need any embellishment.

For up to six months, they toiled on the farms for no wages; and when they got paid for the subsequent months of the year, the wages were nothing short of pittance. The common explanation for the sparse, payment in-kind system was that 'the baas' (an Afrikaans word for a white boss) was cultivating the mealie fields allocated to them 'freely' in exchange for their labour. Buoyed by the 1913 Natives Land Act and subsequent legislations, the 'Boers' (Afrikaans word for a farmer) were seemingly in a no compromising mood.

Renowned South African author, Bessie Head (2016), explains the devastating impact of this legislation on indigenous people, in a moving preamble to Sol Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa*.

"It is possible that no other legislation has so deeply affected the lives of black people in South Africa as the Natives' Land Act of 1913. It created overnight a floating landless proletariat whose labour could be used and manipulated at will, and ensured that ownership of the land had finally and securely passed into the hands of the ruling white race…"

Some of the farm dwellers could no longer endure the conditions that were akin to slavery, so they escaped to faraway places. Mining towns like Johannesburg, Kimberley and Rustenburg were their popular destinations in search of the proverbial better life. However, that was at a risk, and there was always a heavy price to pay for 'absconding'. The 'fugitives' were summarily banned from the farm and placed under strict surveillance.

The farmers had their 'puppets' among the farm dwellers. If caught, they were subjected to rounds of whipping with sjamboks. Along with this was the petty racism that was so stark that cross-racial marriages were literally considered an abomination, as one of the black women and her white fiancé learnt the hard way. They endured such constant harassment, including raids at night until they fled the farm.

I, for one, experienced the conditions of hard labour as a teenager in the 1970s and 1980s, when I regularly worked on farms during school recess. That was during our 'diaspora' in the barren villages, where our family had settled in. We toiled for long hours, sometimes from 6am until 7pm, with no overtime paid. If we were not loading and offloading crates full of tomatoes or round poles from/onto the trucks, we were watering tomato plants through furrow irrigation.

After 1994, our family and community pinned our hopes on land reform. However, as matters stand, it appears that we have been clutching at straws. What was meant to be a constitutional imperative to contribute towards restorative justice has turned into a political gimmick.

In 2019, former president Kgalema Motlanthe gave a brutal, frank assessment as to why South Africa's land reform is failing, when he commented on the National Assembly's adoption of the Constitutional Review Committee's report recommending a constitutional amendment to expropriate land without compensation (EWC). He said, during a public address, that the 2018 report by Parliament's Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture was never considered by the relevant committee.

The report made proposals that sought to allay the enduring concerns around land reform, especially the threats on food security and property rights. Motlanthe, who chaired the panel, said they had had made "simple recommendations… for restitution to be achieved peacefully… with section 25 of the constitution protecting property (rights) and making provision for expropriation in the public interest, while also stipulating how just and equitable compensation should be calculated" (www.moneyweb.co.za: 2019). Instead, parliament, without reading the report, decided that section 25 is implicit about the right to expropriate land without compensation.

Government's hasty decision points to a land reform policy that is in a crisis, fraught with contradictions and oscillating between extremes – devoid of purpose and direction. Earlier in September 2018, former president Thabo Mbeki had also criticised the ANC for its approach in adopting EWC. He said the party's framing of the principle calling for land to be taken away from whites and given to blacks amounted to a betrayal of the ANC's identity of non-racialism. Mbeki said the move showed that the party "is no longer a representative of the people of South Africa… [but rather] a 'black party'." (Thabo Mbeki Foundation: 2018)

As Professor Andries du Toit from the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape puts it, the decision was "a red herring, useful in staging a form of highly effective but ultimately a misleading political theatre" (PLAAS: 2019).

"The move has burdened land reform with a wide range of frankly unattainable expectations, directed attention away from the real reasons for the programme's

lacklusture performance, and failed to provide any clear vision of how a practical programme of land reform could support poor people's livelihood or facilitate emancipatory, inclusive or democratic forms of political practice." The decision was a way of outmaneuvering the Economic Freedom Fighters, forestalling its ability to criticise the governing party until the election was safely over (PLAAS: 2019).

This, then, begs the question: Can land reform ever be 'recaptured' from the grasp of politicians and bureaucrats? This research project has gone beyond the theoretical factors that account for South Africa's failing and flailing land reform, and instead, focused on the impact on affected citizens waiting for restorative justice. The story is told through the voices of a community who had firsthand encounters with white colonial settlers. It is a heartrending story of their cycles of despair and hope – from dispossession, labour tenancy, forced removals and their travails in trying to reclaim their ancestral land while confined in barren and impoverished settlements.

Historical background

"Awakening on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth." (Plaatje: 1916)

This quote by Sol Plaatje aptly captures the fate that befell our family and community. The Seale clan first settled on the portions of land called Sutwane, Makgobole and Mantsho (renamed Sedan, Morgenrood and Vaalwater after dispossession) in the 1830s. The community were part of the Balobedu tribe that settled around the area of the present-day Modjadjiskloof about 400 years ago, after migrating south from present-day Zimbabwe (www.atlasobscura.com: 2018). Our great-great grandfather, King Seale IV, was a member of the Balobedu traditional leadership. The Chieftaincy, under her Majesty, Queen Modjadji, appointed the Seales as leaders of the above portions of lands. (https://www.news24.com/citypress/trending/the-lineage-of-modjadjis-tribe-20200920: 2020).

For a period lasting about a century, the community enjoyed unfettered rights over the land. According to information from the surviving elders in our family at the time our land claim was lodged in December 1998, my great-grandfather, Mmabatho Seale, had been the headman from the 1880s until he died in the 1920s. In keeping with the lineage, the Modjadjis appointed his son, Ramphaka William Seale (born in 1902) as his successor.

For a while, after the introduction of the Natives Land Act of 1913, the community continued to enjoy rights over land. Matters changed with the promulgation of the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936. The defining clause was the one that declared that:

"Land subject to the chapter may not be occupied by natives except under certain circumstances unless, he is a servant of the owner [and] registered labour tenant… registered as a squatter… A native who contravenes this provision… shall be guilty of an offence and may be removed from the land upon which he/she is residing." (www.revolvy.com:1994)

Earlier, the government had introduced the Native Service Contract Act of 1932, which extended labour tenancy to all members of each household and "forced all tenants on white-owned farms to work between three to six months per year… (and) prevented them from leaving the farm without permission" (Pradraig O'Malley Archives: 1994).

These acts all had one common purpose, and that was to reduce the status of Africans as labour tenants. Around the period when the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 was enacted, the colonial settlers appeared and declared our land as theirs. The first white person to appear on our land was a Mrs. Dora Graham, who is said to have bought the land from the government. In the mid-1940s, a Mr. Stephanus Johannes Pohl – commonly known as Thununu – 'bought' the land from Mrs. Graham. Later, Thununu's son, Stephan Montague Pohl, commonly known as Jambren, took over the running of Sedan, Morgenrood and Vaalwater farms. The living and working conditions on the farms worsened in the 1960s when Kaspaas assumed managerial roles on the farm. Beatings and acts of intimidation became the order of the day.

That precipitated the forced departures from the farms. Many community members found 'refuge' in the barren villages of Bolobedu, in the former Lebowa bantustan and its equivalent in Gazankhulu. That marked the beginning of the diaspora and the crumbling of our lineage. Some, like our family, remained on the farms, clinging on to the false hope that the injustice of being stripped of our land, and by extension our royalty, would be reversed. Staying there meant enduring more years of hardship. Ultimately, they were also forced to leave in 1977 and joined other community members in 'diaspora'. The villages they settled in are "blighted by structural poverty, deprivation and underdevelopment… [and which] … remain marked by limited economic opportunities and inadequate infrastructure and state services." (David Neves: 2019)

Stuck in the rural hinterlands, there was renewed hope that the community could reclaim their land when in 1989, former president F.W de Klerk announced the unbanning of political parties and the release of political prisoners. Excitement heightened in 1996, when the then president, Nelson Mandela, signed into the law the constitution. Section 25 of the constitution specifically affirmed an individual's right to land restitution, in terms of the Restitution of Land Rights Act of 1994. Its aim is "to provide for the restitution of rights in land to persons or communities dispossessed of such rights after 19 June 1913 as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices; to establish a Commission on Restitution of Land Rights and a Land Claims Court; and to provide for matters connected therewith." (www.justice.gov.za: 2018).

Our land claim was among the first to be lodged in December 1998, in terms of the Section 10 of the Restitution Act, (Act No. 22 of 1994). More than two decades later, we are still waiting, with no resolution to our land claim. This was despite the Regional Land Claim Commission in Limpopo Province writing to the community in 2005 to endorse our land as valid (see Appendix 5). Despite repeated correspondences, phone calls and visits to the regional office in the provincial capital city of Polokwane, about 120km away, our efforts have all been in vain.

Rationale

"The seed is mine. The ploughshares are mine. The span of oxen is mine. Everything is mine. Only the land is theirs." (*The Seed is Mine*: 1985)

Until 1994, the story of the South African society and its history, since the 17th century when the white man first set foot at the Cape, has been inextricably interwoven with conquest, (land) dispossession and loss of livestock and other properties belonging to indigenous people. It is common cause that what has widely been described as the 'original sin' was committed through violent means. The conquest culminated in the Natives Land Act of 1913, which not only formalised the arbitrary seizures of land and property belonging to indigenous people, but it led to their displacement. This condemned them to a life of vagrancy, poverty and deprivation.

It was in this context that our community found refuge in dry, barren rural reserves or bantustans. Now, as the land question continues to dog South Africa, our community is losing hope of ever reclaiming their birthright. Our land claim lies unattended to, while the issue is being used as a political football.

Through our community and my personal story, I hope that authorities will realise the gravity of this betrayal; that it is unacceptable that "with a quarter of a century since democratic South Africa, only about 15 percent of commercial farmland has been redistributed to its rightful owners" (www.theconversation.com:2017). It is also inexplicable that "by 1999, [at] the end of the first five years, barely one percent of land had been transferred from white to black hands. This was a far cry from the 1994 target of transferring 30 percent of agricultural land." (Ntsebeza: 2011)

According to a PLAAS (2019) report, "it has taken government sixteen years to redistribute 7 percent of white-owned commercial land... and [with] just over three years left to reach the target of redistributing 30 percent of farmland by 2014..." Seven years later, by the end

of 2020, nothing much had changed, except the usual political rhetoric and grandstanding around the issue.

This longform research project has gone beyond the abstract and theoretical data about the successes and failures of land reform in South Africa and instead, focused on the impact of this failure on affected citizens. There is a general lack of understanding of the emotional and psychological torture that the rhetoric and political wrangling on the issue has on those who suffered the ignominy of land dispossession. The lack of political will, purpose and direction in resolving the land issue manifests itself through a chaotic and bureaucratic process, especially at the Regional Land Claims Commission offices in various provinces. These offices are also hampered by poor administrative capacity, characterised by poorly qualified and/or incompetent staff and lack of resources, among other problems.

"Besides been burdened with a problematic understanding of land issues, commissioners were overburdened with work and lacked basic office infrastructure necessary to function effectively. As a result of gross underestimation of the magnitude of the job of providing restitution, the Commission was severely underprepared for the task it has been given." (Michelle Hay: 2015). The Commission for Restitution and Land Redistribution identified six challenges that it faced; namely "database (design, control, centralisation); network (capacity, reliability); computer infrastructure (allocation, quality); policy (content, centralisation); help-desk (regional dependence on experts in Pretoria) and skill (no computer/information technology expertise within offices.)"

It is within this context that the saying that 'justice delayed, justice denied' finds resonance in our community. While the waiting continues, our people are often subjected to ridicule by the commercial farmers, who dismiss the land claim as baseless and frivolous, while our community is often first to be mentioned when other locals mention failed land claims.

My experiences of living and working on the white men's farms show the exploitation of child labour on the farms, and in turn, indicate the triumph of the human spirit. As the enlightened son of a community who emerged from the shadows of farm life, I believe that

have a moral obligation to see to it that justice is served. As Wa Thiong'o explains in a conversation between father and son, the task to reclaim one's land is more than a mission for me; it is worth a calling:

"Njoroge listened to his father. He instinctively knew that an indefinable demand was being made on him, even though he was so young. He knew that for him education would be the fulfilment of a wider and more significant vision – a vision that embraced the demand made on him, not only by his father, but also by his mother, his brothers and even the village. He saw himself destined for something big, and this made his heart glow." (Weep Not, Child: 1964)

Above all, I believe that his story is a microcosm of the plight of communities wrought by discriminatory laws that pushed them off their land. In a country beset with the enduring problems of poverty and inequality, marginalised communities need land if their conditions are to improve. For them, however, "land is [also] held not just as factor of labour but as a source of spiritual connection to the ancestors" (Weep Not, Child: 1964).

Narrative Aim

While I appreciate that land reform is an area that has been researched and extensively reported on, this project has gone beyond the academic or theoretical data to expose the country's land reform for what it is: a noble project and constitutional imperative that has turned into a false moral coinage whose currency remains largely unknown to most affected communities. Since its 'inception' in the mid-1990s, land reform in South Africa has mutated from land redistribution to 'willing buyer, willing seller', and lately, to 'expropriation without compensation' in 2019 with little, if any, success.

With each day, "as contradictions emerge in these policy directions, the foundational logic of land reform is being inverted" Hall, R. *et al*: 2017) and new concepts emerge – devoid of any purpose and direction in practical implementation plan. Apart from its focus on the contradictions afflicting South Africa's land reform, a distinguishing feature of this research project is that is based on information drawn from intimate, personal experiences of a

community who suffered land dispossession and condemned to a labour tenancy system, as well as their travails in trying to reclaim their birthright.

This is what I sought to achieve through this longform narrative article, to reawaken the public's curiosity and deepen their knowledge and understanding of the real impact of South Africa's failed land reform. Through this narrative approach, I believe that I have contributed to bringing to the surface the fact that beneath the shifting narratives and grandstanding on land reform lie the haunting cries of communities whose quest to reclaim their ancestral land is fading. Ultimately, I believe that this sharp focus on the affected community helps deliver a brutal indictment on the government, so that authorities may realise their betrayal and address the issue with greater agency.

Personal interest/Motivation

Land reform in South Africa is an issue that is close to my heart, because my parents, relatives and fellow community members were uprooted from their land and condemned to a life of poverty in barren, overcrowded settlements in the 'Bantustans'. My firsthand experiences of exploitation while living and working on white men's farms was also the motivating factor in embarking on this project.

These experiences have helped shape my identity and taught me to be creative and resourceful, instead of living in the ditch of victimhood. As shown, this is also a story of personal triumph against adversities and a living proof of the power of education as a liberating tool. As Nelson Mandela once said:

"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine; that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another." (saera.co.za: 2016)

Often, when confronted with a harsh world where my home background often meant public scorn, I used education as a tool for self-consciousness, and to wage the struggle for emancipation and empowerment. Ultimately, I hope that through this project, I shall have contributed to my desire to repay my family and community by having our land returned. I have always believed that it has been left to us the current generation to wage the struggle to reclaim our heritage.

Wa Thiong'o [1964] emphasises this point in an episode about a conversation between father and son in *Weep Not, Child*.

"Education is everything," Ngotho said. Yet he doubted this because he knew deep inside his heart that land was everything. Education was good only because it would lead to the recovery of lost lands. You must learn to escape the conditions under which we live. It is a hard way. It is not much that a man can do without a piece of land."

I also embarked on this project because I have been worried that if I do not achieve this during my lifetime, our community's dream of seeing our ancestral land returned may never be realised, because the younger generation do not seem to show interest or attach value to this noble cause. Above all, I was concerned that the elders with intimate knowledge about land dispossession have been dying while those who remain are in the twilight ages, precariously clinging to life. There would be no more fitting tribute to their life of toil and sacrifices than this symbolic act, for the sake of future generations. There is no bigger price than this, and it cannot be measured in monetary terms.

Narrative approach

Nothing was so compelling in telling a long form piece of journalism like this research project as the narrative approach, if it was to arouse curiosity, be compelling and sustain interest. In some cases, the stories I share switch between the non-fiction and fiction techniques, but the narrative still maintains its historical facts, as part of its golden thread. The story is mainly projected in the third person, but it occasionally alternatives between

that and the first person to fit a particular narrative purpose. This was a useful narrative technique that gave me the leeway to delve deeper into the issues, which helped me develop the plot better and expose the themes powerfully.

Using the non-fiction narrative approach has allowed me to use literary techniques such as flashbacks, foreshadowing, scene-setting, creating little scenes, telling stories-behind-the story and other forms of dramatisation. This has also allowed me to develop an immediate connection with audiences, and heighten interest, tension-building and suspense – all of which were useful to make my story compelling and captivating.

Dialogues and personal encounters between the white farmers and their 'servants' on the farm as well as the interactions among the farmworkers all fitted into my narrative strategy, which helped in the dramatisation of conditions on the farms. The community I focused on has presented me with a unique opportunity to tell a story through anecdotes and vignettes of a people crying out for justice. Using characters of community members and their settings in the descriptive prose helped me draw the readers closer into the story, often with the intent of drawing sympathy, and even agitation about the issue.

Interviews with the white farms were particularly indispensable in revealing their apprehensions about land reform. Their views provided a different perspective of land reform, especially on issues such as property rights and food production. As my story sits within a growing and important global body of literature on indigenous peoples' rights, I have also briefly referred to land claim models of other countries, especially the disastrous Zimbabwean approach. Weaving these strands of national and global narratives has served as a thematic treasure that has given this research work purpose and distinctiveness.

This narrative was driven from the perspective of my parents, especially my mother. Her work ethic, devotion and adoration for the white farmers, as well as her unorthodox views about land reform, provided an intriguing tale filled with paradoxes, given the exploitation we endured in the hands of white farmers. Although her views conflict with the community's, they highlighted values that have been entrenched over the years of

dependence on white farmers, with nothing for one to eke out a living out of the established system.

I have juxtaposed my mother's story with my father's because he detested the white farmers. Their conflicting views underscore the extent to which our community was caught up in the tensions over the land claims issue. I have also linked the experiences of our family and the community to specific historical contexts and timeframes in the country. This helped give the story a universal approach and appeal. In telling my story, journalism sites such as Poynter institute, **The Atavist**, **Epic** and Longreads that offer useful tips on narrative journalism and riveting storytelling techniques were consulted.

Literature Review

Scholarly work, non-fiction, and fiction literary works

This project draws on three types of literature: scholarly work on land reform, fiction and non-fiction works on how indigenous people were dispossessed of their land, with devastating consequences. As land reform in South Africa evolved from 'land redistribution', 'willing buyer, willing seller', and lately, 'expropriation without compensation', various scholars and historians have sought to explain the contradictions, complexities and tensions that have emerged. A plethora of non-fiction and fiction literary works has also been published that deal with this matter, tracing its trends, patterns, and twists and turns over the last two decades.

Apart from the scholarly works that cover existing literature, I have consulted works by researchers/scholars that I do not necessarily mention in this research project. Among these scholars/researchers are Peter Delius, Maanda Mulaudzi, Rachidi Molapo, Dineo Skosana, Laura Phillips, Gavin Capps, Arianna Lissoni and Shirley Ally. Although their works do not directly address the issues that I focus on in my research project, they help give a broader perspective of various factors at power play regarding land reform in South

Africa. Their works were useful in locating and linking certain personal accounts in my project to specific timeframes and/or milestones in the history of South Africa.

The other type of literature that I consulted is based on a combination of historical contexts and personal experiences of people who suffered loss of land. While their focus may be on the political economy of land reform, their depiction of dispossession, labour tenancy and provide important insights that have helped me develop my research topic in a better way.

Sol Plaatje has been indispensable in this regard, as his literary work describes the impact of land dispossession with the artistic mastery not apparent to anyone. *Native Live in South Africa* stands out for its powerful and moving depiction of the impact of dispossession. As Bhekizizwe Peterson noted:

"It is evident in the book that Plaatje is aware of the intricate politics of reading, writing, narrative and performance, and that he marshals a range of literary, linguistic, stylistic and performative strategies. Plaatje uses aesthetics to negotiate the complexities, ambiguities, paradoxes and pleasures that informed the consciousness and agency of Africans and the fractured readerships that they..." (Bhekizizwe Peterson: 2016)

I also drew inspiration from the works of African literary giants such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kweyi Armah, which are indispensable in the manner they depict the struggles of indigenous people during the colonial era and the betrayal of liberation ideals during the post-colonial period. Doris Lessing and Olive Schreiner's works give an illuminating and disturbing account of exploitative conditions on farms, among other relevant themes. Although their works are largely immersed in a world of imagination, they write in an intense and compelling style that deals with real-life issues of land, deprivation, oppression, betrayal and corruption that pervade many African societies. Overall, the literature I have consulted can broadly be classified into the following themes: wandering, fear and loathing, hope and despair, racism, virtue co-existing with evil and search for identity.

Wandering

The theme of wandering features prominently in most literary works that I referred to. *Native Land in South Africa* (1916)*, The Seed is Mine* (1985) and *Land of* My *Ancestors (*Botlhale Tema: 2019), three non-fiction books I consulted, are populated by indigenous people who are forever in transit, searching for fixed places of abode. In *Native Life in South Africa,* Plaatje details a chilling eye-witness account of the "many native wanderers (who were uprooted from their spiritual homes) "trudging aimlessly from one place to another in search of some farmer who might give them land". Finding themselves at the mercy of a piece of legislation and white farmers with no scant regard of their wellbeing, the indigenous people have no option but to keep shuffling from one place to another.

Plaatje writes, in one of his memorable episodes describing the heart-wrenching account of the plight of indigenous people, "wrought by a single stroke of the pen" that was the Natives Land Act of 1913:

"They moved up country, but only to find the next farmer offering the same terms, however, with a good many more disturbing details – and the next farmer and the next – so that after this native farmer had wandered from farm to farm, occasionally getting into trouble for travelling with unknown stock, 'across my ground without my permission."

Plaatje writes in another telling episode: "*Ramothibi woke up a vagabond that day. Not that he woke up – the poor man had not even shut one eye since going to bed the previous night. His mind had been wandering since the day he was told about the new land law. A very cruel law."*

Similarly, the indigenous people in *The Seed is Mine* keep moving between rural slums and land owned by white farmers.

"…so black tenants were pressured into accepting wage labour; when they refused, they were evicted, and in a renewed search for land-rich but labour-poor white land, they were driven farther north and west into drier areas…"

All these echo the plight that befell our community before and after they were uprooted from their land.

Fear and loathing

Parallel with wandering is the theme of fear and loathing. In *Land of My Ancestors*, fear grips the community of Moletji, outside Polokwane in Limpopo, from the moment the white colonialists launch a bloody raid on them in search of slaves in 1852 (despite the fact that slavery had been abolished in 1834 by the British). Fear stalks every corner of the indigenous people because of the constant evictions they have to endure even after they had moved to the present-day North-West province, that they are almost always resentful of colonialists.

"This is it! Bakgatla are sitting pretty, their hearts are white with satisfaction over the vengeance they wrought on the Boers. The miserable creatures will never come back to torment them again… Let's go finish them off before they come, they try to evict you."

A feeling of fear and loathing is also ubiquitous in Ivor Price and Kobus Louwrens's book, *For the Love of the Land*, which traverses South Africa's farming landscape to capture individual stories of ordinary farmers. Anxiety and undercurrents of hatred over the expropriation without compensation policy, crime and criminality and corruption are pervasive among the farmers. Theirs is a world where, "when the midnight insomnia descends…, (they) think of our old farmhouse under the moon and my parents sleeping in their cage, and sometimes the fear engulfs me, and it feels like I cannot breathe". (Tema: 2019).

Hope and despair

Concomitant with fear and loathing is hope and despair, which is among the overarching themes in many of the books I referred to in this project. In *Weep Not, Child*, Wa Thion'go, explains the symbolic meaning of land in relation to hope, while writing about the man who continued to stay closer to the land occupied by colonial settlers in Kenya, prior to the Mau Mau Rebellion.

"Ngotho rarely complained (about the working conditions). He had all his life lived under the belief that something would happen. That was why he did not want to be away from the land

that belonged to his ancestors. That was really why he had faithfully worked for Mr. Howlands, tending the soul carefully and everything that was in it." (Weep Not, Child: 1958)

This is similar to the dilemma of my grandfather, Ramphaka William Seale, who remained at Sedan after our family left their farm in 1977.

For the Love of the Land delves into the enduring tensions arising from the uncertainties and anxiety about South Africa's land reform. In one of the phrases, the son of an Afrikaner farmer reveals his father's apprehension about expropriation without compensation.

"I did not understand it then, but he made me promise that he would not be buried there once he departed this world because we would lose the farm through land expropriation someday". (For the Love of the Land: 2019)

Although a feeling of despair is palpable among the black people who attended the Parliamentary public hearings on land reform, there was discernible glimmer of hope among them. Writing in the book about what he said at the hearings, a Mpumalanga farmer reveals his desire to see the dream of his ancestral land returned.

"Mr Chairperson, although Parliament has enacted the Restitution of Land Rights Act in 1994, it has not helped our family recover their land or have their dignity restored. We hope that, if Section 25 is amended, it could help my father to get his land back before he joins his ancestors in their eternal sleep." (For the Love of the Land: 2019)

Racism

The spectre of racism runs deep, along with its undercurrents of anger, betrayal, hatred, and humiliation in all the books I refer to. Where the racial prejudices are not shown in physical action, they are expressed through all manner of epithets. In *Native Life in South Africa*, Plaatje recounts the rants by the wife of an Afrikaner farmer bemoaning the loss of cheap labour on her property, because of the imminent eviction of indigenous people by her husband.

"… I hope you idiotic kaffirs are not going to be so foolhardy as to leave me, leave the Baas, and leave the farm upon which your fathers and mothers lie buried…"

Racism also reeks throughout *The Grass is Singing.* In one of the many instances revealing this, during a conversation between two neighbouring farmers, it has developed to a point of paranoia:

"Whenever two or three farmers are gathered together, it is decreed that they should discuss nothing but the shortcomings and deficiencies of their natives. They talk about their labourers with a persistent irritation sounding in their voices: individual natives they might like, but as a genus, they loathe them to the point of neurosis."

In *Down Second Avenue*, Mphahlele gives a disturbing account of the racial stratification in Pretoria, where racial groups are depicted as accorded a measure of privilege than their black counterparts. At one point, Mphahlele himself gets to taste the cruelty of racial prejudice when an Afrikaner man severely assaults him while he was on his way to attend a parade for what was then called Dingaan's Day (a public holiday which was then meant to commemorate the Voortrekker victory at the Battle of Blood River, which the Boers saw as a revenge for Piet Retief's killing by Dingaan, the brother of the Zulu king Shaka.)

"Step out, kaffir! This is no monkey show," yelled an Afrikaner man, before he beat Mphahlele to a pulp.

Just as in *Down Second Avenue*, Doris Lessing, in her novel, *The Grass is Singing*, gives a chilling account of the fixation with race among the Rhodesian (modern-day Zimbabwe) society during British rule, especially the racial hierarchical system that placed whites at the zenith of the socio-economic structure.

Virtue co-existing with evil

Amid the spectre of racism and its concomitant vices of cruelty, exploitation, and oppression, there are white people, albeit few, who display compassion and benevolence towards black people. In *For the Love of the Land*, we are told of a Limpopo farmer who gives his black workers employment benefits such as annual leave, as well as paying them decent wages – long before government mooted the idea of the minimum wage bill.

The farmer, Burgert van Rooyen, also started community development projects for his workers. Another farmer, from the Free State, guided by his "motto that you must always plant a tree under which you will never sit" initiated empowerment projects for his workers.

In the *Land of My Ancestors,* Henri Gonin, a Swiss missionary stands out as the knight in shining armour, because of his determination to help indigenous people who are subjected to exploitation by the colonial regime. He offered indigenous people fleeing Afrikaner farms asylum on his farm, started a school for their children and even gave scholarships to study in 'elite schools'. It was for his generosity that "a new class of people emerged as education transformed the commoner's status, lending it the authority and respectability previously reserved for royalty."

Even when this came at a personal risk, he was not deterred, as some of the indigenous people he assisted reveal.

"After his arrival in Moruleng, Gonin had to deal with the political tension between the Bakgatla tribe and the Boers. He faced the dilemma of being given an ultimatum to return to his home – (but he) decided to buy land for the tribe."

Gonin's benevolence did not go unnoticed by indigenous people, as Stephanus said in a moving tribute, upon learning of Gonin's death.

"Gonin had been such an important part of our lives. We almost believed he would always be an important part of our lives. We almost believed he would always be around. Even though Father and Uncle never talked much about how they had met him, there was always an abiding sense of gratitude to Gonin. I felt particularly grateful to him because he had arranged a scholarship for me when I went to Lovedale so that Father only had to pay for living expenses."

Among the hostile colonial masters in *Native Life in South Africa*, a few white farmers show traits of compassion towards indigenous people.

"We also passed through a few farms where the white farmers were visibly sympathetic towards the harried natives. Some of the white farmers were accepting natives as tenants on

their farms in defiance of the law. We naturally thanked these for their humanity and went our way, promising never to disclose their magnanimity to the government officials".

Search for identity

In a realm of racism and oppression, the search for identity strongly emerges among the indigenous people. In the *Land of My Ancestors*, the quest for lost identity is expressed through ditching of colonial names that were dished out "… with a shove and the stroke of a pen" [46] in preference of African names.

The advent of Christianity also brings with it the struggle for identity among indigenous people who suddenly find themselves confronted by a new religion whose practices are at odd with their tradition. Often, Christianity pitted families against each other and contributed to the divisions in communities.

Tema writes about the community of Moruleng in the North-West, whose orderliness and unity were suddenly put to test by the arrival of the new religion.

"Two young missionaries from the Cape joined him (Gonin), and the village was almost split between those who embraced Christianity and those who would not abandon their age-old beliefs for the traditions of strangers." (Botlhale Tema: 2019).

Desktop research

In working on this longform narrative research project, I consulted a wide range of contemporary and historical publications, including newspaper/media articles, magazines and journals, policy and legislature materials. In the same vein, Parliament's final report of the Presidential Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture, which is also drawn from the Land Restitution Act of 1994, was worth perusing.

Media houses and NGOs, locally and internationally, have dedicated their capital and resources to covering land reform and its shifting narratives through newspaper articles, journals and books, which I found useful in providing a broader perspective of the focus topic. Online resources such as websites (of farms like ZZ2), Facebook and Twitter pages (like the Pohl and ZZ2) as well as YouTube (ZZ2) were valuable archival footages of the farming activities and their interactions with farm employees and politicians.

All these provided useful contexts and insights into South Africa's land reform before I set out to visit the farms to conduct interviews. Reading all existing material helped me to prepare for and conduct interviews with the farmers with clarity of purpose, direction and focus – ensuring that the questions I asked were relevant to my topic. As the debate around land reform is a shifting narrative, I kept searching for other related materials as and when they were published.

Methodology

Qualitative interviews

In undertaking this research project on a topic as emotive as land restitution, it was important to present historical facts as accurately as possible, without any embelishments. In the absence of archived materials, oral interviews with the affected communities proved an indispensable method to collect information. Allowing the interviewees to tell their lived experiences on the farms, their personal encounters with the white farmers and other significant and dramatic shifts about their life history proved vital in revealing important information.

Oral history through qualitative interviews, was an impactful way to immerse readers in the story and heighten awareness of the broader issues about the impact of land dispossession and a floundering land reform on affected communities in general. As Natalie Federer (2015) observed, "oral history has (through the ages) been vital in uncovering and capturing the history of marginalized groups, communities of shared memory, political struggle and strife, and social history, while also being used to capture family histories, lived experience, and much more".

First-hand experiences on the community, especially the last surviving elders, helped develop a clear historical perspective about the land claim, identifying key events, turning points and key themes in the land claim process. This was useful in developing the plot and driving the story in an impactful way. Additionally, land claim affidavits deposed by the elders about land dispossession, while limited in information, gave useful historical

contexts about our family history. Similarly, oral interviews with some of the sons and grandsons of the white farmers who were among the first colonialists to occupy the disputed land helped give the story an interesting dimension, because of their divergent views and anxieties about land reform. This was important in making the project credible.

Site visits and observations

Visits to the lands that were dispossessed from my family and our community, as well as those I worked on, were a key feature of this narrative piece. The fact that most of the sites like houses and other physical structures, including graves, are rundown and in ruins was helpful in painting a picture of the devastating effects of land dispossession and forced removals.

The visits were also useful in retracing our community's and my own footprints on the land. This helped in recreating the scenes, as I was able to reminisce and paint a vivid picture of my childhood experiences on the farms, including the exploitative living and working conditions and the changing face of farming in South Africa. Through such observations and formal and informal interviews with the farmers and ordinary workers, I was able to immerse myself as far as possible with our life history on the farm.

Despite the pain of exploitation and enduring constant verbal abuse and physical abuse on the farm, visiting the farm evoked fond memories of the other side of life that was blissful and idyllic life, characterised by swimming, fishing, scouring the bushes, hunting for wild berries and the weekend revelries when the farming communities descended on our family compound to savour the sorghum beer and African music. All of these helped me tell my narrative article in a compelling way, painting a clear picture of the scenes in a vivid manner.

Archival material

Libraries have a wealth of reference materials such as archives, research papers, photographs and other collections on the issue of land dispossession. Museums also have useful exhibits of relevant information such as the South African War (Anglo-Boer war) and other skirmishes between the white settlers and indigenous people in the early days of

conquest in the former Northern Transvaal and other provinces, as well as historical events such as Mfecane (Shaka's territorial wars) and the King Sekhukhune of the Bapedi people. There are also archival materials about the implications of the Natives Land Act of 1913 and successive legislations in relation to the Northern Transvaal and more specifically the Mopani region, which is the area of my research.

As such, it was important that I visited the libraries and consulted relevant materials as I embarked on this research project. This was useful in providing a broader understanding of the contentious issues around the history of land dispossession and land reform in South Africa.

Personal and ethnographic observations

As someone who grew up living and working on the white people's farms, first-hand experiences and observations were useful in providing insights about the life on the farms during apartheid South Africa, in relation to the prevailing circumstances today. My intimate experiences and inside information of conditions on the farms gave this narrative article a unique dimension and enabled me to tell my story in a manner that an 'outsider' would not have. In addition, and as already mentioned, visits to select farms provided was useful as it evoked memories that helped shape my story in a captivating manner. Physical features such as graves, cattle kraals and other important sites provided useful graphic material or evidence from which the story could be anchored from.

Challenges

In working on this research project, one of the challenges I faced was the lack of vital archival material needed for verification and to give the land claim credibility. This was because most of our elders in my family and the community cannot read and write. As a result, most of the information was sourced through oral interviews and observations.

However, oral history and narratives also have their own complexities, because of the challenge with memory. A project like this required accuracy of information, and most of the elders in our community are so old that not all of them necessarily had a precise recollection of the events that transpired regarding land dispossession and other lived

experiences on the farms. As Michelle Hay (2015) aptly puts it, “As old age brings the deterioration of mental function and memory, the past that needs to be recounted drifts further and further away.”

As a researcher, I had to find a strategy to overcome this limitation. As information was drawn from memory may be both fallible and infallible, I needed to find additional strategies to help verify and qualify such oral information. One of the ways was to do a comparative analysis of the information obtained. I also scrutinised and evaluated the information gathered against existing literature on land dispossession and land reform. This was because I understood that the burden lay with me as the researcher to seek, research, sift and dig through whatever available material is available to verify historical narratives. This helped in clarifying and addressing whatever discrepancies that existed.

Another way that I used to mitigate the risk of rendering the research project doubtful, was to use some of the community members’ fond or intimate memories about their experiences on the land or farms they lived and worked on. Elderly people tend to speak in a long winded way, and it was important that I accorded them that leeway and select information as and when I deemed it relevant.

Their nostalgia of the farms helped me to tell their experience in a spontaneous way, thereby helping eliminate whatever biases and prejudices that may exist. Jacob Dlamini makes this clear in his book, *Native Nostalgia*, in which he reminisces on some of the memories of living in apartheid South Africa without necessary dwelling on the usual, dominant narratives of apartheid as an oppressive and wicked system. Through the playful use of the Afrikaans language and his dwelling on other imposed apartheid ways, Dlamini subtly manages to keep biases and ill-conceived ideas about the political system at bay.

Similarly, I used this approach to allow the community that suffered land loss to tell their experiences on those properties without necessarily being intrusive in my approach. As they did so, they revealed their encounters with the Boers and their experiences of labour tenancy and forced removals in an intimate and spontaneous manner that is free of biases.

Related with the challenge of memory was that some relatives and community members with ‘institutional knowledge’ about our land and its history have been dying, while the last

surviving of the elders of that era are now at the twilight of their ages. As the ancient African proverb goes, “every old man that dies, is a library that burns.” This called for greater urgency in undertaking this research project, and this is precisely what I aimed to do in this research project.

Ethical considerations

The debate around land reform is one of the most emotive and racially charged issues in post-apartheid South Africa. There is growing agitation among commercial white farmers about property rights due to the conflicting and contradictory statements about land reform. As a result, access to farms on the land that was taken from our family as well as those that I worked on in order to collect vital exhibits and conduct interviews, was a challenge, and in some cases, a risky exercise. More so as I am part of the land claim committee that has targeted the farmers’ land for land restitution, which meant that I was conflicted.

To navigate these challenges, I needed to use my journalism skills when approaching the farmers. This was important if they were to see me not just as a part of a group of people who have claimed their land but as a concerned citizen and scholar conducting useful research. Apart from the letter from the University authorising such a research, I had to use my negotiation skills and be as persuasive as possible.

But then, there was another ethical dilemma. Due to my first experiences of living and working on the white men’s farms, there was always a risk of biases and prejudices on my part that I needed to manage. In this regard, I needed to avoid bringing preconceived ideas and had to show emotional intelligence and rationality, instead of allowing resentment to cloud my judgement. My journalistic experience was again useful in navigating this ethical dilemma and help develop this research project into a credible scholarly work.

Another ethical dilemma was the possibility that in interviewing with my parents, relatives and other community members affected by land dispossession, I may re-inflict their pain of land loss and toiling in conditions akin to slavery. This may have aggravated their

frustrations about waiting for too long for the land claim to be resolved, especially as I am part of people leading the land claim process. Again, my journalistic experience was indispensable in navigating this, as I approached the interviewees courteously and responded to their concerns in a reassuring but truthful and sensible manner without diminishing their hopes.

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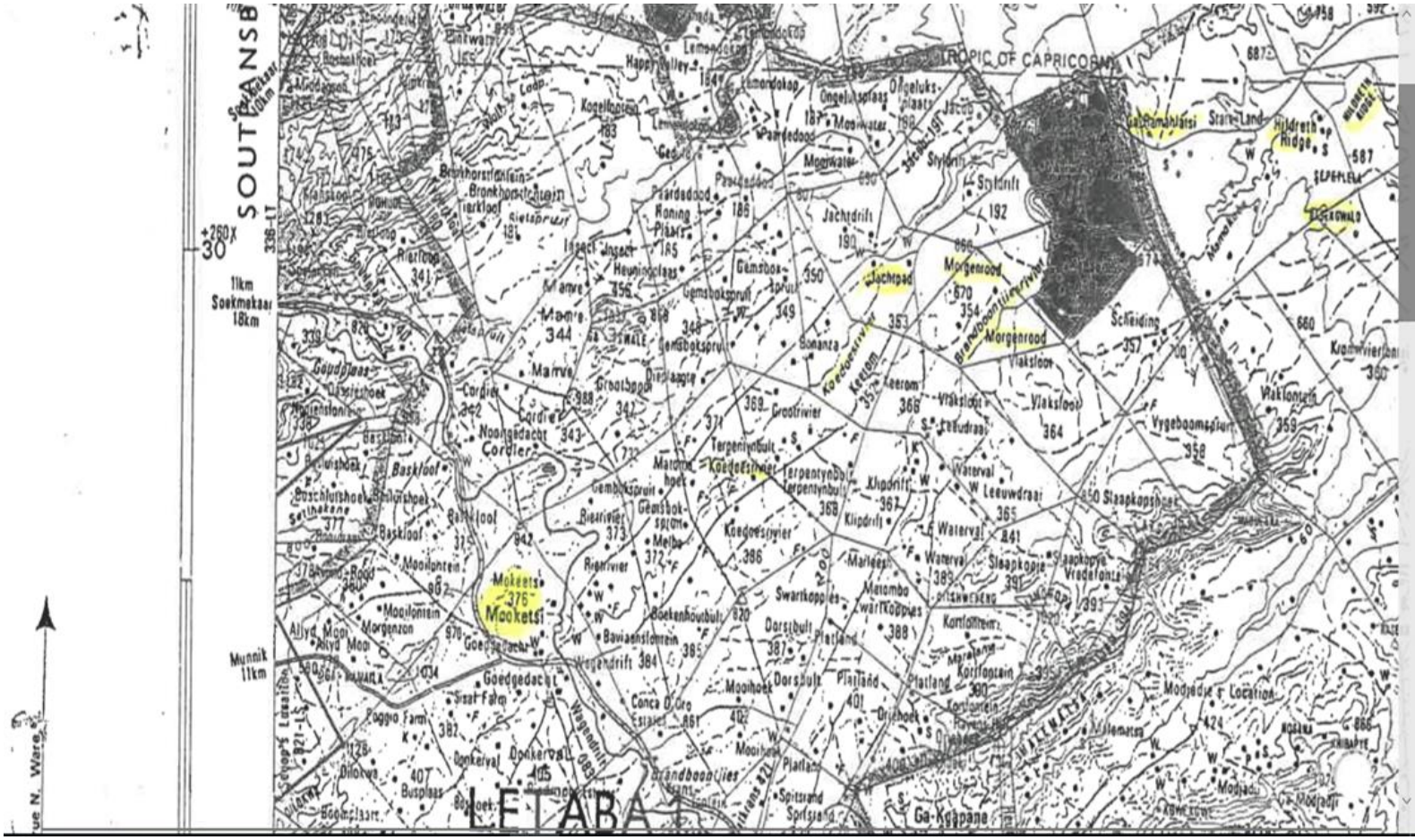
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Appendices

Appendix 1



Appendix 2



Tito Mboweni @tito_mboweni: Then a late lunch with the ZZ2 van Zyl brothers at the Mountain Cafe, Makgoebaskloof. Beautiful day… God bless. 7:45 AM - 10 Mar 2018

Appendix 3



Tito Mboweni @tito_mboweni: Always feels good spending time with friends and family. Here at the ZZ2 Sanga Lodge with the Van Zyls and Kgosi Mbabata Modjadji. 1 March 2020. Near Tzaneen. #VisitLimpopo. Appendix 4

Appendix 4

Rule 3 of the Rules Regarding the Procedure of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 On the basis of the above-mentioned information, the Office of the Regional Land Claims Commission: Limpopo Province is therefore convinced that the Seale Tribal Trust have a *'prima-facie'* valid land claim in terms of the Restitution of Land Rights Act (Act No.22 of 1994), as amended, read with Rule 3 of the Rules Regarding the Procedure of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights.

12. RECOMMENDATION

12.1 It is therefore, recommended that the Seale Tribal Trust land claim be accepted as a prima-facie valid claim and be approved for gazetting.

MEDUPI SHABANGU
PROJECT OFFICER
DATE: 16/05/2005

Recommendation 12.1 approved/not approved/amended

MR MASHILE MOKONO
REGIONAL LAND CLAIMS COMMISSIONER
LIMPOPO PROVINCE
DATE: 17/05/05

Appendix 5

JOUBERT & MAY ATTORNEYS
P. O. BOX 35
TZANEEN
0850

FAX NO : 015 307 1787

Dear Sir

RE: SEALE COMMUNITY LAND CLAIM

Your letter dated 02nd March 2006 to which a counter research is attached bears reference.

The Regional Land Claims Commission: Limpopo has had the opportunity of going through your client's research report as against the RLCC:Limpopo's report.

We now wish to advice that the Commission has reached a conclusion that the land claim by Seale Community has merits. The Commission shall therefore not withdraw the gazette.

The Commission wishes to propose negotiations around settlement of Seale Community land claim, unless your client's are of the view that no settlement will be reached. In the event of the latter, the Commission shall have no option but either to refer the matter to the Land Claims Court or to make a submission to the Minister in terms of Section 42E of the Restitution of the Land Rights Act no. 22 of 1994 as amended.

Kindly revert to us within five (5) days of the receipt hereof, in order to fast track this claim.

Appendix 6

0700

Dear Sir/Madam

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to confirm that the Seale Community existed as a community and has been under her Majesty Queen Modjadji of the Modjadji Traditional Authority since the late 1880's.

The Seale Community has been under the leadership of Mr William Ramphaka Seale, who was ordained as the Head (Induna) of communities that resided in the areas of land listed below:

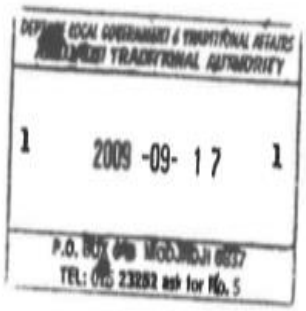
- Sedan (Sutwane)
- Mogenrood (Makgobole)
- Vaalwater

Subsequently, the Modjadji Tribal Community endorses the Seale Community as the rightful and legitimate claimant of the above – listed farms. This endorsement puts to rest any dispute or conflict that may have existed between Seale Community and any other community that may have lodged a counter claim against them.

We hope this will assist the commission to fast track the restitution of the above – mentioned farms to the Seale Community, which is the rightful and lawful owner.

Yours faithfully

Modjadji Land Claim Committee



Appendix 7

ACCEPTANCE CRITERIA 1 Sections 11 and 2(1) of the Restitution of Land Rixhts Act 22 of 1994 (as amended) read with

Rule 3 of the Rules Regarding the Procedure of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights.

SEALE TRIBAL TRUST COMMUNITY CLAIM ACCEPTANCE REPORT.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: THE FARMS VAALWATER 193 LT, SEDAN 356 vr and MORGENROOD 354 LT, REGISTRATION DIVISION LT. See (Annexure A) property list.

PROVINCE: LIMPOPO PROVINCE

DISTRICT: LETABA

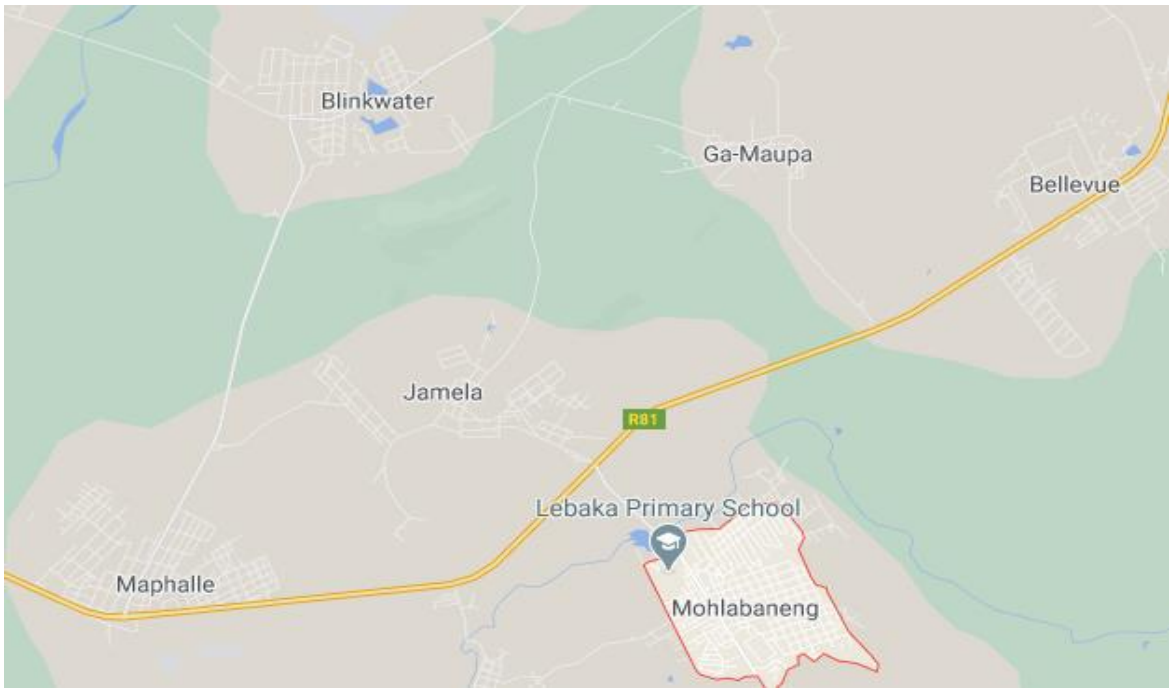
1. DESCRIPTION OF THE LAND

1.1 The land claimed comprises of the farms Morgenrood 354 LT, Sedan 356 LT, and Vaalwater 193 LT in the district of Letaba, in the Limpopo Province. They are bordered by Vlaksloot 364 LT on the South, bordered by Jachtdrift 190 LT on the West, bordered by Mamakobe village on East and Rotterdam 159 on the North.

1.2 Here under is a list of all the properties under claim in tabular:

Farm Name	Portion	Title deed no.	Extent
Morgenrood 354	1	T89176/ 1988	226.0773
Morgenrood 354	2.	T51047/ 1987	313.8268
Morgenrood 354	3	T98S04/ 1997	70.7681
Morgenrood 354	4	T51047/1987	300.0532
Sedan 356 LT	1	T33080 1977	290.4766
Sedan 356LT		T48170/ 1990	744.2868
Vaalwater 193 LT	1	T89177 1988	428.2660
Vaalwater 193 LT		T89174 1988	929.2687

Appendix 8



Appendix 9

