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

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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.