The Enduring Legacy of the Native Land Act of 1913: Investigating its profound Impact on Landownership and Access for Black South Africans

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Open Rubric

Declaration of Originality

I, Moekadi Kgwete with student number: 60963115, degree: Master of Arts in History, exploring dissertation entitled, The Enduring Legacy of the Native Land Act of 1913: Investigating its profound impact on Landownership and Access for Black South Africans, do hereby declare that this dissertation is a product of my own research work and all the sources used herein are duly acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that I submitted this dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality. Furthermore, I declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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Moekadi Kgwete Date 20 October 2025

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents Modulanoshi Samuel Kgwete and Matia Meisie Kgwete, as well as my brother Khomotso Kgwete and sister Modipadi Kgwete who served as a source of encouragement. May they find inspiration in this work. It is further dedicated to MA candidates in South Africa and all over the world all who face the challenges of academic life. May it offer hope, encouragement and a reminder that perseverance and determination make success possible.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANC – African National Congress

BAA – Bantu Authorities Act

EFF – Economic Freedom Fighters

IYN – Imbumba Yama Nyamo

LPM – Landless People's Movement

NAD – Native Affairs Department

NEA – Native Education Association

NLA – Native Land Act

NLB – Native Land Bill

NLC – Native Land Committee

NLCA – Native Location and Commonage Act

NRC – Native Recruiting Corporation

PAC – Pan Africanist Congress

POA – Program of Action

SADT – South African Development Trust

SAHO – South African History Online

SANNC – South African Native National Congress

SANT – South African Native Trust

TCB – Trust for Community Benefit

TLGFA – Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act

TNC – Transvaal Native Congress

TBVC – Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei

VOC – Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie

ABSTRACT

The Native Land Act of 1913 has long been recognised as a significant moment in South Africa's history, shaping patterns of dispossession, inequality and exclusion that continue to reverberate into the present. As one of the earliest legislative instruments of institutionalised segregation, the Act profoundly altered the relationship between land, identity and power, with enduring consequences for the social, economic and political fabric of the country. In this study, I argue that the Act was not merely a historical artefact of colonial administration but a *sine qua non* or tapestry in the systemic entrenchment of racialised dispossession. The legislation deliberately restricted black South Africans' access to land, producing economic dependency, intergenerational poverty, fractured kinship networks and the erosion of cultural identity, while simultaneously reinforcing gendered and spatial hierarchies. Its legacy remains *de facto* inscribed in contemporary struggles over land reform, restitution and socio-economic justice. Methodologically, the study adopted a qualitative approach grounded in archival analysis and community-based case studies. Government records, parliamentary debates, newspapers, personal letters, maps and photographs were systematically examined to illuminate both the ideological underpinnings of the Act and its lived consequences. The analysis was further informed by Critical Race Theory, which provided a lens for interrogating how law and policy functioned as instruments of racialisation while amplifying the voices of marginalised communities. By tracing the Act's historical origins, economic ramifications, social and psychological impacts, and political implications, this research contributes to scholarly discourse on land, inequality, and justice in South Africa. The findings underscore that the Native Land Act was not an isolated legislative measure but a catalyst for structural inequalities that persist *inter alia* in land reform debates, spatial development and cultural dislocation. Addressing its enduring legacy requires not only equitable redistribution but also a deeper reckoning with the socio-economic, cultural and psychological dimensions of dispossession.

KEY TERMS: Dispossession; Native Reserves; Wage Labour Economy; Migrant Labour System; Sharecropping; Racial Capitalism; Rural Poverty; Tenancy and Evictions; Overcrowding; Generational Wealth Loss; Political Exclusion; Structural Inequality; Spatial Segregation; Township System; Informal Settlements; Homelands (Bantustans); Cultural Dislocation; Gendered Inequalities; Resistance Movements; Land Restitution and Reform

CHAPTER ONE

Framing Dispossession —Theoretical Foundations and Methodological Orientation of the Native Land Act of 1913

1.1. Introduction

"Awaking on Friday morning, 20 June1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth."[1] With these haunting words, Sol Plaatje captured the seismic rupture that followed the passage of the Native Land Act of 1913 [hereafter the Act]. This legislation did not simply restrict land ownership; it reconfigured the very foundations of social, economic and political life. By legally sanctioning racialised expropriation, the Act entrenched patterns of inequality that penetrated every aspect of black existence — shaping livelihoods, undermining cultural identity, and embedding structural forms of dependency. Its passage marked the beginning of a legal architecture that would later be deepened under apartheid, leaving a legacy that still echoes in contemporary land debates, restitution struggles and questions of justice.

The impact of the Act has been enduring; it is the most significant and highly contested legislation. Its effects on land ownership and access among black South Africans were both profound and long-lasting, generating systemic inequalities that continue to shape socio-economic conditions in the present. The Act also left an indelible imprint on public and scholarly debates, fundamentally informing debates on land reform and justice within the country. Its implications remain central to contemporary struggles over equity, as the historical injustices it institutionalised continue to weigh heavily on black communities. Understanding and critically interrogating these enduring effects is thus essential not only for acknowledging past wrongs but also for guiding current policy formulation and advancing meaningful land reform initiatives.

The present work does not only treat the Act as a legislative measure but also examines it as a foundational mechanism that systematically dispossessed black people of land, entrenched racial inequalities and established structures of economic dependency and social marginalisation that persist to this day. It was argued that the Act was a watershed moment whose effects continue to reverberate across social, economic, political and cultural spheres.

[1] A. S. C. Dodson, *The Native Land Act of 1913 and Its Legacy*, Johannesburg Bar, vol. 024, no. 1 (2013), 29.

The work further contends that the Act's deliberate restriction of land ownership, combined with its socio-political enforcement, produced enduring economic disparities, disrupted family and community cohesion, undermined cultural identity and reinforced gendered and spatial inequalities. Moreover, by linking landownership to political rights, the Act effectively disenfranchised black people, shaping both historical and contemporary struggles for justice, restitution and equitable land reform.

1.2. Background and rationale for the study

The roots of land dispossession began with the early expansion of Dutch colonial settlements in the Cape. Before the Dutch Colonial settlements, land ownership among black people was characterised by communal principles and managed through traditional customs, with land viewed as a public trust rather than a commodity. Indigenous black people occupied extensive territories, managing land through decentralised systems governed by customary laws. Upon their arrival, the Dutch began to seize land and livestock, marking their territory and means of generating economic wealth. However, it erupted into conflict with various indigenous groups, like the San, Khoikhoi, Sotho, Zulu and Xhosa. With the increasing conquest of Africans, colonial authorities came together to discuss on how to deal with the Africans. The government of the Union of South Africa faced the "Native problem", which referred to the status of indigenous people in relation to the European population, as defined loosely at the 1903 Inter-colonial Conference to address the issue of land dispossession. The British divided territories and annexed over time and also passed down laws such as the Glen Grey law of 1894 to displace African populations, paving a way for increasing segregation and reserving large areas for white settlers.[2] The policies that were established weakened the indigenous people's hold on their ancestral land, forcing them to travel further and further in search of new territories to settle, and some were forced to live in small territories and forced to become labourers/squatters on white-owned farms or migrant workers on mines.

In the wake of the South African War, the British and Afrikaners established a new territory in the country in 1910, deliberately excluding Black individuals from political participation. They aimed to secure land for settlement and economic exploitation, particularly for

[2] Ibid.

agriculture and mining since there was some valuable mineral resources such as gold and diamonds. The British imperial interests began to direct South African affairs, resulting in the annexation of different territories and the displacement of the Black communities. Following its passage in 1913, the Act officially deprived black people of owning the majority of land. The Act allocated roughly 93% of the land to whites while they were only a quarter of the population. The whites-only area contained fertile soils, access to water sources, and grazing fields, which would generate wealth for white South Africans. The remaining 7% was reserved for black people, and they were allocated to overcrowded and less fertile areas, often referred to as reserves or homelands, which left blacks to struggle.[3]

However, the systematic dispossession had already far-reaching consequences on social, cultural and economic aspects of black communities, shaping the trajectory of landownership and access for generations to come. The Act had Social Impacts which led to the displacement of black people from their ancestral lands, confining them to overcrowded and impoverished reserves that lacked essential facilities such as water, fertile soil, schools and hospitals. This resulted in environmental degradation, healthcare crises, and food insecurity, which had severe implications for people's health and living conditions.[4] Furthermore, the Act entrenched apartheid ideology, reinforcing white supremacy and black inferiority, and systematically denied some Africans' civil rights, including the right to vote, own property, or work in certain occupations. This created a class system based on skin colour, profoundly affecting the dignity, self-esteem, and confidence of black people.

The Act also had severe economic impacts, depriving black people of their natural resources and forcing them into manual labour jobs. Thousands of black sharecroppers and farmers were removed from their land, losing their wealth and cattle, and were forced to seek low-paying jobs to pay taxes. This led to widespread poverty, unemployment and economic marginalisation. The Act paved the way for the apartheid regime, created long-lasting societal divisions, and contributed to modern-day social and economic problems in South Africa. The Act occupied a central role in the lives of black communities and in the systematic

[3] L. Stantley, “Natives Land Act, 1913,” www.whiteswritingwhiteness.ed.ac.uk/Trances/Land-Act/ (accessed October 30, 2024).
[4] Ibid.

dispossession and marginalisation of blacks from their ancestral land and it also left an on-going legacy of discussion that has shaped the land reform debate within the country.

1.3. Motivation for the study

The researcher was motivated by the recognition that the Act, whose reverberations continued to shape the social, economic, political and cultural realities of black South Africans. While the Act's immediate legislative and economic implications had been documented, its enduring socio-cultural, psychological and gendered consequences represented largely uncharted terrain in existing scholarship. The deliberate restriction of land ownership and the socio-political mechanisms enforcing dispossession had produced enduring economic disparities, disrupted family and community cohesion, undermined cultural identity and entrenched spatial and gendered inequalities. These complex legacies constituted a critical lacuna in the historiography of South African land policy, which the researcher sought to interrogate.

By investigating the long-term ramifications of the Act, the researcher aimed to bridge this gap, situating historical dispossession within its contemporary manifestations in land access, inequality and restitution debates. The study sought to uncover the intertwined economic, social and cultural dimensions of land dispossession, highlighting how historical injustices continued to shape community resilience, intergenerational poverty and contested notions of ownership and belonging. Academically, the research addressed the lacuna concerning the nuanced experiences of women, marginalised groups and the psychosocial impacts of dispossession, thereby extending the discourse beyond the legislative and economic analyses that dominated earlier scholarship.

Ultimately, the researcher endeavoured to map this uncharted terrain to illuminate the continuing legacies of the Act, offering a more comprehensive understanding of historical injustices and their present-day consequences. In doing so, the study contributed both to scholarly knowledge and to policy-relevant discussions on equitable land redistribution, restitution, and the restoration of cultural and social agency, demonstrating that the enduring impact of the Act is neither abstract nor historical alone, but profoundly tangible in contemporary South African society.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The study is significant because it illuminates the profound and enduring impacts of systemic racial dispossession on land ownership and access among blacks. By foregrounding the historical mechanisms that perpetuated inequality and marginalisation, the research addresses a critical gap in understanding how the Act shaped South Africa's socio-economic and cultural landscape across generations. This Act, as a pivotal legislative instrument, had entrenched segregation and laid the groundwork for the apartheid system, leaving long-lasting imprints on land distribution, economic opportunity, and social cohesion. Investigating its enduring consequences enabled the researcher to unpack the historical roots of contemporary land disparities and to situate these within broader struggles for social justice and equitable development.

The study also engaged with the profound social and emotional dimensions of land, recognising that access to land is inseparable from livelihoods, identity, and cultural belonging. By examining the Act's role in systemic dispossession and forced removals, the researcher brought into focus how historical injustices were embedded into legal, economic, and spatial frameworks that continue to constrain black South Africans' agency.

Moreover, the study explored the legal and policy ramifications of the Act, showing how legislation that restricted land ownership and occupancy to white interests has had enduring effects on land reform initiatives. The research revealed the continuing structural barriers that have limited economic participation and wealth accumulation among black communities, underscoring the ways in which historical dispossession intersects with contemporary policy challenges. By doing so, the study sheds light on the need for inclusive legal mechanisms and redistribution strategies that address historical inequities while promoting sustainable socio-economic development.

Finally, the study emphasised the broader significance of historical inquiry for reconciliation and healing in post-apartheid South Africa. By tracing the Act's enduring legacy, the research

contributes to an understanding of how historical injustices continue to shape social relations, community cohesion, and intergenerational equity. The study not only advances academic knowledge but also offeres insights relevant to policy and practice, supporting dialogue, restorative initiatives, and the pursuit of a more just and inclusive society.

1.5. Statement of the problem

The Act of 1913 represents a pivotal juncture in South African history, yet its enduring impact on black South Africans' relationship with land remains insufficiently interrogated. While existing scholarship has extensively chronicled the Act's immediate effects during the colonial and apartheid periods (Hall 2014; Beinart & Delius 2014), there is a persistent gap in understanding the complex, long-term legacies of dispossession, cultural dislocation and structural inequality (Modise & Mtshiselwa 2013). In particular, the social, economic and political consequences of the Act on black communities have not been fully analysed in relation to contemporary patterns of land access, ownership and cultural identity. The literature demonstrates a notable ambiguity regarding how historical injustices continue to shape present-day inequalities, leaving unresolved questions about the mechanisms through which systemic exclusion persists across generations (Hall 2014; Bundy 2013).

Moreover, prevailing land reform initiatives have often prioritised legalistic and economic frameworks while neglecting the cultural and symbolic significance of land, thereby constraining opportunities for meaningful restitution, reconciliation and social healing. The interplay of social, economic and cultural dimensions in perpetuating structural disadvantage underscores the need for a holistic analytical approach that moves beyond conventional economic and legal narratives. By situating historical dispossession within ongoing struggles for land restitution, this research illuminates the Act's relevance to contemporary challenges, including equitable land redistribution, intergenerational poverty and persistent socio-economic disparities. In doing so, the study advances a nuanced understanding of how the legacies of the 1913 legislation continue to shape land access, cultural identity and social justice in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.6. Research Questions

1.6.1. What were the underlying motives behind the implementation of the Act of 1913, and what were its direct consequences?

1.6.2. How did colonial economic interests, political power and social factors shape the formation of the Act?

1.6.3. How did the Act reflect the prevailing attitudes towards indigenous land rights and racial segregation?

1.6.4. How did the Act impact different Indigenous groups and regions immediately after its enforcement?

1.6.5. In what ways has the Act of 1913 influenced landownership patterns among black South Africans?

1.7. Hypothetical point of departure.

The hypothetical point of departure for this study began with the premise that the Act significantly impacted landownership and access for blacks in which the legislation is assumed to have played a pivotal role in perpetuating socio-economic disparities, stifling rural and urban development, and shaping land reform discourses. Specifically, this study assumed that the Act had contributed to persistent socio-economic disparities, including income disparity, land redistribution challenges, cultural erosion, educational inequalities, intergenerational poverty and health inequalities. The Act has perpetuated unequal land ownership patterns, resulting in black South Africans being underrepresented as landowners despite comprising a significant majority of the population. Additionally, the slow progress and bureaucratic inefficiencies that have characterised land redistribution efforts since the end of apartheid can be attributed to the structural inequalities by the Act. It has also resulted in unequal access to credit and limited job opportunities, inefficient restitution processes, significant backlogs and unequal land allocation, loss of indigenous knowledge systems and loss of ancestral lands, limited access to quality education and exacerbated by language barriers, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure, resulting in restricted access to essential healthcare services.

In addition, the Act is believed to have laid the foundation for persistent challenges in land reform, including the sluggish in land reform, legal and bureaucratic obstacles, and tensions between restitution and economic development.

1.8. Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to provide an in-depth analysis of the enduring impact of the Act of 1913 on land ownership and access for black South Africans. The qualitative framework was particularly suited to exploring the historical, socio-economic, cultural, and political dimensions of land dispossession, allowing for a nuanced understanding of both structural patterns and lived experiences. The primary method of data collection involved archival research. Archival analysis was employed to systematically examine historical records, government documents, and contemporaneous writings. Sources included parliamentary proceedings, legislative texts, administrative correspondence and reports of the Native Trust and Land Act (1936), as well as historical newspapers, periodicals, diaries, personal letters, maps, photographs and other visual materials documenting the Act's implementation and impacts. Archival analysis allowed the study to trace both the legislative intent of the Act and its immediate and long-term effects on black communities across South Africa.

In addition, the study incorporated selected case studies of specific communities affected by the Act. These case studies were strategically chosen for their relevance to central themes, including land dispossession, resilience, and contemporary challenges associated with land reform. A total of two to three communities were examined, with each case study encompassing individual, family and organisational perspectives to capture multiple dimensions of experience. The case studies provided detailed insights into the localised and community-specific impacts of the Act, highlighting variations in how dispossession was experienced and resisted. Data collection and analysis involved a systematic review of historical documents, complemented by qualitative interpretation to identify recurring patterns, themes and consequences of the Act.

According to Wilson, Alexander Township is one of the few areas where black people could own land under freehold title before the Act's passage.[5] The township presents a fascinating example of the complexities of land ownership and racial segregation in South Africa. The

[5] Monica Wilson*, Alexandra Township and the Alexsan Kopano Research Centre: Background Report for UNESCO.* LINK Centre, University of the Witwatersrand, 57.

township's history, marked by neglect, overcrowding and poverty, serves as a powerful illustration of the Act's devastating consequences.

1.9. Research Objectives

This study aimed to interrogate the enduring legacy of the Act, situating it not merely as a historical legislative measure but as a pivotal determinant of contemporary inequalities in land ownership, access, and socio-economic opportunity among black people. While existing scholarship has predominantly emphasised the Act's legislative mechanics and immediate economic outcomes, this research sought to uncover the broader, multi-dimensional consequences—spanning social, cultural, and intergenerational effects—and to critically examine how these legacies continue to influence contemporary land governance, restitution, and community well-being.

The research was guided by five key objectives:

1. To critically examine the historical and legislative context of the Act, investigating the political, social and economic forces underpinning its formulation and implementation, as well as the mechanisms through which it codified racialised land exclusion.
2. To analyse the immediate and long-term socio-economic impacts of the Act on black communities, including wealth distribution, agricultural productivity, labour migration, housing, and intergenerational poverty.
3. To explore the cultural and psychological consequences of land dispossession, focusing on disruptions to community cohesion, spiritual practices, and cultural identity, and how these effects have been transmitted across generations.
4. To evaluate the Act's enduring legacy in contemporary land governance and reform, examining policies, restitution initiatives, and ongoing challenges in achieving equitable access to land and resources.
5. To foreground the experiences of historically marginalised groups, particularly women and vulnerable communities, highlighting their resilience, agency, and participation in contemporary debates around land justice and social equity.

These objectives were operationalised through a set of interlinked research questions, discussed below, which interrogated the legislative motivations of the Act, its socio-economic and cultural consequences, regional and urban–rural variations in its impact, and its relevance to present-day policy and restitution initiatives. By integrating historical analysis

with contemporary socio-political inquiry, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the Act's enduring impact, linking structural inequalities of the past to ongoing challenges in land access, equity, and social justice in South Africa.

1.10. Literature Review

The Act represents a defining moment in South Africa's history, producing profound and enduring consequences for land ownership, socio-economic structures and cultural identity among black South Africans. Scholarship has extensively documented the Act's historical and legislative context, but persistent gaps remain in understanding its long-term cultural, psychological, and gendered impacts. A critical review of the literature underscores both the strengths and weaknesses of existing studies, highlighting areas that require further exploration. Early foundational texts such as Davenport and Saunders' *A Modern History* (1991) provide an essential legal and historical framework, detailing the legislative mechanisms through which the Native Land Act systematically disenfranchised black South Africans. Davenport and Saunders' situates the Act within the broader landscape of colonial and Union-era segregation policies, effectively demonstrating the legislative intent to concentrate land ownership within white communities. Similarly, Feinberg (1993) expands on this foundation, providing a nuanced analysis of the Act's political motivations and the economic interests that shaped its formulation, particularly those of white farmers and the state. While these works offer rigorous documentation and a clear explanation of legislative purpose, their primary limitation lies in their narrow focus on short-term economic goals and legal frameworks. They provide little insight into the social, cultural, and psychological consequences of dispossession, leaving a critical dimension of the Act's legacy underexplored.

In contrast, Walker's text (2008) shifts the analytical lens toward the long-term consequences of the Act. Walker examines how the dispossession of land continues to shape rural poverty, urban displacement, and systemic inequality. This work contributes significantly to understanding the enduring socio-economic effects of land loss and highlights the Act's role in perpetuating spatial inequality. However, Walker's analysis, while expansive, still leaves gaps in the detailed exploration of gendered experiences and community-level responses to dispossession, underscoring the need for localised and intersectional research.

Beinart and Delius (2014) further enrich the literature by interrogating the legislative intent of the Act, emphasising its role in consolidating white economic power and formalizing dispossession under the guise of agricultural modernisation. Their work is particularly valuable for illustrating how the Act institutionalized systemic inequality, yet it largely overlooks the strategies of resistance employed by indigenous communities during the formulation and enforcement of the legislation. Feinberg's archival research into parliamentary debates complements this by revealing the racial ideologies underpinning the Act, but, again, indigenous voices are minimally represented. Modise and Mtshiselwa (2013) briefly acknowledge the involvement of indigenous leaders and religious institutions in resisting dispossession, yet their treatment is cursory, signaling a gap in the historiography regarding grassroots and organized opposition.

A substantial body of work addresses the socio-economic implications of the Act. Hall's text (2014) provides a detailed analysis of how forced removals and restricted access to agricultural resources entrenched poverty among black South Africans. Van Wyk (2013) extends this discussion to spatial planning, illustrating the Act's long-term impact on urban and rural segregation and its contribution to contemporary spatial inequalities. Walker (2014) pushes this further by integrating cultural and psychological perspectives, highlighting the disruption of spiritual practices, communal cohesion, and indigenous identity caused by forced alienation from ancestral lands. Despite these contributions, these studies still inadequately address gendered experiences and the intersectionality of race, class and gender in shaping responses to land dispossession.

Cultural and psychological dimensions are explored in more recent scholarship. Beinart and Delius (2014) underscore the significance of land, framing it as a repository of identity, heritage, and autonomy. Boyd (2021) complements this by providing an indigenous perspective on the breakdown of communal tenure systems and the resulting cultural dislocation. These studies highlight the profound intergenerational trauma associated with dispossession. Yet, they tend to generalise across communities, leaving a critical need for micro-level studies that capture local variations, community resilience strategies, and coping mechanisms.

Contemporary debates on land reform illustrate the ongoing relevance of these historical insights. Boyd (2021) advocates for integrating indigenous stewardship practices into policy

frameworks, challenging conventional Western notions of property ownership. Thompson (2019) situates current land struggles within the broader historical trajectory of colonial land policies. However, scholars remain divided on the effectiveness of land reform programs, with Hall and Walker calling for more ambitious redistribution, while Van Wyk cautions against potential economic instability. This divergence underscores the necessity of empirical, context-specific research that evaluates both the social and economic outcomes of reform initiatives. Despite this extensive scholarship, several critical gaps remain. First, the experiences of women remain underexplored. Existing studies largely adopt macro-level economic and political perspectives, overlooking the gendered dimensions of dispossession. Women bore disproportionate burdens from household disruption, loss of access to resources, and forced migration, while simultaneously acting as agents of resilience within their communities. Second, the psychological impacts of land dispossession, including intergenerational trauma, remain largely unexamined. The severing of communities from ancestral lands disrupted social networks, cultural practices, and spiritual life in ways that persist today. Finally, there is a need for localized, community-specific research that captures how different regions navigated the challenges of dispossession, adapted to systemic exclusion, and engaged with restitution efforts.

Future research addressing these gaps would benefit from interdisciplinary approaches combining historical, anthropological, psychological, and spatial methodologies. Oral histories, ethnographic studies, and GIS mapping could illuminate the enduring spatial, social and economic consequences of dispossession, while feminist and decolonial frameworks would allow for nuanced analyses of intersecting inequalities. Integrating these approaches can provide a holistic understanding of how dispossession has been experienced, resisted and remembered, and how these historical legacies inform contemporary policy and land reform debates.

In conclusion, the literature provides a strong foundation for understanding the legislative, socio-economic, and cultural dimensions of the Act, but significant gaps remain. By critically engaging with these sources, this study seeks to expand knowledge of the Act’s enduring legacy, particularly regarding gender, psychological impacts, and community-specific experiences.

1.11. Critical Note on Sources: Extended Discussion

Research on the Act and its enduring effects in South Africa relies on a diverse range of archival, primary and secondary sources, each providing unique insights while also presenting specific limitations. A critical engagement with these materials was essential to reconstruct the social, economic, political and cultural consequences of the Act, while addressing biases and gaps inherent in the historical record.

Archival research formed the backbone of the study, offering access to the legislative, bureaucratic and activist records that illuminate both the formulation and implementation of the Act. The National Archives of South Africa (NARSSA) contained parliamentary debates, government reports, departmental correspondence and census data, which were invaluable for tracing the legal frameworks and administrative decisions underpinning land dispossession. Hansard records, for instance, provided verbatim accounts of parliamentary deliberations and reflect the prevailing attitudes of legislators toward indigenous land rights, racial segregation, and colonial economic priorities. These sources enabled the researcher to understand the motives behind legislative choices, as well as the rhetoric used to justify the exclusion of other races. However, such documents also reflected the perspectives and biases of the state and ruling elites. They systematically omitted African voices and rarely captured the lived experiences of those most affected. To address this limitation, the study triangulated archival legislative records with contemporaneous accounts from African political organisations, newspapers and oral histories.

The South African History Archive (SAHA) offered complementary perspectives through activist correspondence, petitions and protest materials opposing the Native Land Act. Records from organisations such as the SANNC (later ANC) and the PAC illustrate the mobilisation of African communities against systematic dispossession. These documents provided insight into resistance strategies, political discourse and the framing of grievances, illuminating the agency of black South Africans often absent from official records. A critical strength of these sources lies in their documentation of grassroots resistance, which challenges the dominant colonial narrative. However, archival gaps remain. Many early records were either never collected or were destroyed, limiting comprehensive coverage of localised resistance, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, activist records can reflect internal biases, prioritising narratives that align with organisational agendas over broader

community experiences. To mitigate this, the study cross-referenced archival material with oral histories and missionary accounts, providing a richer understanding of community perspectives.

Provincial and municipal archives further contributed detailed information on land allocation, forced removals and the administration of reserves and homelands. Local magistrate reports, cadastral records and municipal correspondence revealed the everyday enforcement of the Act and its social consequences. These sources enabled the study to map regional variations, showing how implementation differed across urban and rural contexts and among different indigenous groups. The strength of these sources lies in their specificity; they provide a granular picture of administrative processes, resource allocation and community displacement. Yet, such records were often incomplete, and bureaucratic language can obscure the human suffering underlying land dispossession. Cross-referencing these documents with newspapers, oral histories and photographs helped to recover the lived experiences behind administrative reports.

Missionary and church archives were particularly valuable in the Act. Diaries, letters and institutional reports document education, health, family disruption and community organisations in affected areas. Missionary correspondence, such as that from the Lovedale Missionary Institution, revealed how land dispossession intersected with religious education and social control. While these sources offer detailed observations of daily life, they are shaped by the missionaries' ideological positions, often framing African communities in terms of Christianisation, civilisational development or moral improvement. This perspective can marginalise indigenous voices and underrepresent resistance or cultural adaptation. To overcome this, the study critically interrogated missionary materials against indigenous oral histories and activist records, ensuring that African agency and perspectives were foregrounded.

University and private archives, including the Alan Paton Centre and Wits Historical Papers, provided access to personal papers of influential intellectuals and activists such as Solomon Plaatje and Pixley ka Isaka Seme. These collections illuminated the intellectual and political

responses to dispossession, capturing both analytical reflections and personal experiences of the Native Land Act. A major strength of these sources was their combination of personal narrative, political analysis and advocacy, which contextualises historical events within broader struggles for rights and justice. However, their focus on prominent individuals inadvertently downplayed the experiences of ordinary community members, women and marginalised groups. Triangulation with oral histories, newspapers and municipal archives helps to balance this elite-focused perspective.

Primary sources such as newspapers, oral histories, photographs and historical maps complemented archival materials. Newspapers, including both black and white press outlets such as *Imvo Zabantsundu*, *The Native Leader* and the *Rand Daily Mail*, provided contemporaneous reporting on land dispossession, protests and political discourse. Editorials, letters to the editor and reportage of forced removals allowed the researcher to assess public opinion, societal reactions and the framing of African communities by the media. However, newspapers carry inherent biases, reflecting the political orientation of the publication and the social position of their authors. To address this, the study uses multiple publications and cross-checks reportage with oral histories and archival documentation.

Oral histories provided rich, qualitative evidence of the Native Land Act's long-term impacts. Interviews with descendants of affected families, community narratives on displacement, and projects such as the South African Oral History Archive offered insight into economic marginalisation, cultural erosion and intergenerational trauma. These sources foreground the voices of those often silenced in written records and allowed for a nuanced understanding of gendered and spatial inequalities. The limitations of oral histories include the influence of memory, retrospective reinterpretation and potential selective recall. By corroborating oral testimony with archival, newspaper and photographic evidence, the study ensured that these narratives are validated and contextualised.

Historical maps, cadastral records and GIS overlays allowed the researcher to track changes in land distribution, spatial segregation, and regional variations in implementation. These visual sources were critical for understanding patterns of inequality and the geographical dimensions of dispossession. Photographs of forced removals, rural and urban settlements

and labour conditions provided additional visual evidence of the Act. The limitations of these visual sources includes partial coverage, lack of context and potential selection bias, as images may have been staged or framed by colonial authorities or missionaries. Careful interpretation, supplemented by written records and oral histories, mitigated these concerns.

Secondary sources contextualised primary and archival material within broader historiographical debates. The works of Davenport (1991), Feinberg (1993), Beinart (2014), Saunders (1991), Walker (2008) and Delius (2014) provided detailed analyses of legal, economic and socio-cultural aspects of the Act. Various journal articles informed the interpretation of systemic inequalities, intersectional impacts and enduring legacies. While these sources offered critical insight and scholarly analysis, they rely on the selection and interpretation of primary sources and may reflect disciplinary or ideological biases. The study mitigated these limitations through cross-disciplinary engagement and by interrogating assumptions within the secondary literature.

To overcome the limitations inherent in these sources, several strategies have been employed. First, triangulation across multiple source types—including archival records, newspapers, oral histories, photographs and secondary literature—ensured validation of information and reduced reliance on any single perspective. Second, critical engagement with the ideological framing of colonial, missionary and government records enabled identification of bias, while cross-referencing with indigenous and activist sources foregrounds African agency. Third, gaps in archival or textual coverage, particularly regarding local experiences, gendered impacts and rural communities, were addressed through oral histories, case studies and GIS spatial analysis, allowing for reconstruction of socio-economic and cultural realities. Finally, the study applied theoretical frameworks such as Critical Race Theory and Post-Colonial Theory to interrogate systemic structures of inequality, guiding interpretation and providing coherence between historical evidence and contemporary implications.

Through this multi-pronged methodological approach, the research produced a nuanced, critical, and balanced analysis of the Act, tracing its long-term economic, social, political and cultural consequences. By combining diverse sources and addressing their inherent

limitations, the study ensured that both macro-level legislative frameworks and micro-level lived experiences are integrated into a comprehensive understanding of the Act's enduring legacy in South Africa.

1.12. Overview of Chapters

Chapter One introduces the study by examining the Act as a pivotal moment in South African history. It highlights the profound dispossession experienced by black South Africans, situating the Act within the broader context of colonial and Union-era land policies. The chapter explains the historical roots of land dispossession, detailing pre-colonial communal tenure systems and the disruption caused by European settlement and subsequent legislative measures. It outlines the study's motivation, significance, research questions, theoretical framework, methodology and objectives, establishing the foundation for understanding the enduring social, economic, and cultural consequences of the Act.

Chapter Two explores the historical context and origins of the Act. It situates the Act within pre-colonial, colonial, and early Union-era developments, tracing the political, economic, and social forces that enabled racialised land dispossession. The chapter examines pre-1913 land ownership among African communities, highlighting communal tenure systems and the social, spiritual, and environmental connections to land. It interrogates early colonial expansion, wars, annexations, and forced removals, showing how European settlers systematically undermined indigenous land control. The chapter further analyses the political and economic motivations behind the Act, illustrating how white agricultural and capitalist interests, coupled with the demand for cheap African labour, drove segregationist legislation. It also examines the workings and implementation of the Act, showing how these measures formalised dispossession and entrenched economic dependency.

Chapter Three focuses on the economic legacy of the Act. It highlights how the Act deliberately restricted black South Africans' land ownership to marginal reserves, undermining agricultural productivity, trade, and wealth accumulation. The chapter explores the forced integration of black South Africans into wage labour and the migrant labour

system, detailing how these mechanisms created economic dependency and entrenched poverty. It examines regional variations, the disruption of family and community structures, and intergenerational consequences, illustrating the persistence of economic inequality and restricted mobility. The chapter also examines contemporary continuities, highlighting how historical patterns of dispossession and exclusion persist in shaping South Africa's economic landscape.

Chapter Four examines the social and psychological impacts of the Act. It analyses forced removals, the breakdown of family networks, and the erosion of cultural identity, dignity, and autonomy. The chapter explores gendered consequences, emphasising the burdens placed on women and the weakening of traditional authority structures. Additionally, the chapter considers spatial and urban impacts, detailing how segregated settlements, overcrowding, and informal urbanisation emerged as a direct consequence of the Act. The chapter concludes by examining how these social and psychological effects persist in the post-apartheid era, shaping contemporary struggles over land, housing, and spatial justice.

Chapter Five interrogates the political implications of the Act. It demonstrates how the legislation linked land ownership to political rights, disenfranchising the African majority and consolidating white minority control. The chapter explores the systematic exclusion of black people from governance, the co-optation of traditional authorities, and the emergence of resistance movements. It highlights early petitions, mass meetings, and campaigns against dispossession, showing how land grievances became central to broader struggles for political rights and justice. The chapter also examines contemporary land reform debates, restitution policies, and activism, illustrating the enduring influence of the Act on political mobilisation and the ongoing quest for equitable land access. Politically, the Act entrenched white minority control by linking landownership to rights and citizenship, disenfranchising blacks and prompting organised resistance that would become central to broader struggles for justice and equality. The long-term consequences of these historical injustices continue to shape contemporary debates over land reform, restitution, and socio-economic redress. This study showed that the Act was not merely a historical event but a catalyst for structural inequalities that ripple into the present, affecting access to resources, wealth accumulation, and political participation. Recognising and addressing its legacy is crucial for informed policy,

reconciliation, and the pursuit of social justice, demonstrating that equitable land reform in South Africa requires both historical awareness and sustained commitment to correcting systemic inequities.

Chapter 6 explores African resistance to the 1913 Natives Land Act and the contemporary mobilisation against the slow and uneven progress of post-apartheid land restitution—epitomised by movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Landless People's Movement and other grassroots formations—constitute an unbroken historical continuum through which African voices expose the enduring legacies of colonial dispossession, contest the state's failure to deliver substantive land justice, and reassert land as the indispensable foundation of a truly completed liberation project.

Chapter Seven concludes the study by highlighting the enduring legacy of the Act and how it fundamentally reshaped landownership, systematically dispossessing black South Africans of fertile land and confining them to marginal reserves, while simultaneously creating structures of economic dependency and inequality that persist across generations. Its social and psychological impacts are equally profound, disrupting family networks, eroding cultural identity, and imposing gendered burdens, particularly on women, as communities were forced to adapt to new spatial, economic, and social realities.

Overall, the chapters collectively trace the historical origins, economic, social, and political impacts, and contemporary relevance of the Act, providing a comprehensive understanding of its enduring legacy.

CHAPTER TWO

The Question of Origins: Tracing the Historical Context and Foundations of the Native Land Act of 1913

2.1. Introduction

The Native Land Act of 1913 [hereafter referred to as “the Act”] is rooted in centuries of conquest, dispossession and structural inequality. To understand the Act is to trace the historical forces and policies that laid the groundwork for its passage, revealing a continuum of exclusion that shaped the political, economic, and social landscape of the country. Far from an isolated legal measure, the Act emerged from a long trajectory of colonial land seizures, labour exploitation, and the institutionalization of racial hierarchies. Its mechanisms—legal prohibitions on land acquisition, state-controlled land allocation, individualisation of plots through primogeniture, and labour coercion—did not appear spontaneously; they were built upon the foundations of earlier colonial legislation, conquest and economic imperatives that systematically marginalised African communities. The Act’s explicit restrictions, such as Section 1(a) reserved fertile land accessible to white settlers reflected centuries of structural advantage accumulated by colonial authorities and settler elites.

Existing communal land practices, including sharecropping and tenant farming, were dismantled, reinforcing dependence on wage labour and undermining self-sustaining African agricultural systems. State mechanisms like the Native Lands Commission formalised bureaucratic control over land, displacing traditional leadership and imposing externally defined land tenure rules. These legal and economic structures were intertwined with political and social exclusion. Property-based franchise laws, spatial segregation policies fand the eventual establishment of Bantustans confined Africans to underdeveloped areas and removed their voice in governance. Labour regulations, taxes, and pass systems enforced compliance, ensuring a ready supply of cheap labour while perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization.

Understanding the Act through the lens of its origins illuminates how it was less a single legislative event than the culmination of a historical process. It synthesized legal,

bureaucratic, economic and social strategies developed over centuries to dispossess, control, and marginalise African populations. By tracing these foundations, one can see the Act not only as a tool of land control but as a strategic instrument designed to entrench racial inequality, shaping the economic and political architecture that would evolve into apartheid. Its legacy is a stark reminder of how historical processes, institutionalised over time, can formalize exclusion and perpetuate structural injustice across generations.

2.2. Pre 1913 Situation: Before the passage of the Act

Before the Act was passed, indigenous communities in South Africa maintained well-established land tenure systems that were deeply embedded in their social, political and spiritual organisation. Land was traditionally held communally, with the community collectively determining access, usage, and stewardship of resources such as arable land, grazing areas, and water sources. Cousins and Claassens highlight that communal tenure allowed the community to control membership, allocate resources equitably, and ensure sustainability, while Boisen emphasises that such systems guaranteed African control over land allocation and use.[6] Land was not treated as a commodity for individual accumulation but as a vital resource sustaining the collective well-being of the community, a stark contrast to the European conception of private ownership.

Regional variations in communal land practices reflected sophisticated systems of governance and environmental management. Among the Xhosa and Zulu, chiefs or kings allocated land based on household needs, holding it in trust for future generations, thus ensuring ecological sustainability. The Sotho and Tswana managed land through rotational systems dividing arable, residential and grazing areas, demonstrating an advanced understanding of agricultural cycles and soil management. Chiefs and elders acted as stewards, adjudicating disputes, reallocating land when misused, and maintaining environmental balance. Among the Xhosa, the paramount chief distributed land to sub-chiefs, who coordinated with local families, while in Venda society, chiefs allocated land through

[6] Boisen, C. (2017). *From land dispossession to land restitution: European land rights in South Africa. Settler Colonial Studies*, 7(3), 326. https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2016.1139861.

communal consent, ensuring accountability. Zulu settlements under Shaka incorporated land into military and governance structures, linking land use to social organisation and defence.[7]

Economic status within indigenous groups, particularly among the Khoikhoi and San, was closely tied to control of key resources such as livestock and tools. The Khoikhoi, primarily herders, derived wealth and social standing from cattle, goats and sheep, whereas the San, primarily hunters, occupied a dependent position within the social hierarchy due to their limited access to resources. Relationships between these groups ranged from conflict to clientship, with the San providing services such as herding, hunting, and protection in exchange for food or milk, yet denied ownership of livestock to prevent competition. Agriculture and herding formed the backbone of indigenous economies, relying on environmental conditions such as rainfall, soil fertility and water availability. Advanced farming techniques, including intercropping, terracing, and crop rotation, ensured productivity and sustainability, while livestock contributed to both ecological balance and socio-economic relationships. Cattle, in particular, held social, economic, and spiritual significance, forming the basis of trade, dowries, ritual practices, and family alliances, while land itself was considered sacred, serving as a site of ancestral connection and communal identity.

The arrival of European colonisers disrupted these indigenous systems. Initial contact with the Khoisan in the Cape led to land dispossession, ecological disruption and erosion of traditional practices. Subsequent European expansion, including the Boer Great Trek, systematically undermined indigenous governance and communal land tenure. Colonisers imposed Western property laws, dismissed African stewardship as primitive, and introduced racial categorisation to control access and entrench authority over land.[8] Consequently, pre-1913 land ownership, characterised by sophisticated, ecologically informed and socially integrated systems, was progressively distorted and delegitimised to justify the dispossession and subjugation of indigenous peoples. The pre-1913 communal ownership and sustainable management practices reveal that indigenous communities possessed

[7] K.D. Fowler and L.O. van Schalkwyk, *"The Amakhuanada Settlement System in the Zulu Kingdom," Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 60, no. 2 (2025): 290.
[8] A.B. Smith, *"Hunters on the Periphery: The Ideology of Social Hierarchies between Khoikhoi and Soaqua," Kronos: Journal of Cape History* 24 (1997): 14, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41056384

advanced, equitable systems of land governance, directly challenging colonial narratives that portrayed them as disorganised and primitive—a narrative used to rationalise the systematic exclusion entrenched in the Act.

2.3. The Workings of the Act: Early Roots of Land Dispossession

The genealogy of loss of land and landlessness is inextricably bound to the establishment of European colonial authority in 1652, which was consolidated through the British imperial occupation of the nineteenth century. The inception of colonial settlement under Jan van Riebeeck — ostensibly for the creation of a refreshment station for maritime routes between Europe and Asia — initiated an enduring process of territorial expropriation. European settlers appropriated land inhabited by the Khoisan, rationalising such seizures through the legal fiction of *terra nullius* and the spurious claim that the land was "vacant." [9] This act of dispossession disregarded the pre-existing systems of communal stewardship, rotational grazing, and sustainable land management that characterised indigenous governance.

The British consolidation of power from 1806 onwards entrenched a juridical regime that privileged European modes of property ownership while invalidating African customary tenure. By translating land into a commodified and alienable resource, colonial administrators transformed African relationships to territory into one of subordination. As Cock and Wells observe, white settlers systematically expanded their grazing and agricultural frontiers through coercive seizure, rendering dispossession a structural and enduring feature of the colonial economy.[10] This process of alienation was underwritten by violence and coercive diplomacy. Indigenous leaders such as Moshoeshoe I of the Basotho and King Cetshwayo of the Zulu sought to preserve territorial sovereignty against overwhelming military force, yet successive defeats resulted in the fragmentation of indigenous polities and the erosion of their agrarian base. The dispossession of fertile and strategically vital lands displaced African populations into marginal and environmentally degraded areas—conditions later institutionalised under Section 1(a) of the Act. After the discovery of minerals in 1867 and 1886, respectively, the situation changed completely. The discovery itself intensified the process of territorial expropriation, accelerating the fusion of agricultural and extractive capitalist economies under white control. African land and labour were reoriented to serve the demands of the mining-industrial complex, while the coercive apparatus of the state—

[9] Ibid.
[10] South African History Online, "William Cock," accessed December 3, 2025, https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/william-cock.

through taxation, pass laws and the erosion of communal tenure—ensured a steady supply of migrant labour. This transformation prefigured the economic coercion that would later be codified in the Act, which bound Africans to a cycle of enforced dependency and labour subordination.

Throughout the nineteenth century, colonial authorities employed legislative and administrative instruments to institutionalise dispossession and consolidate labour control. The Native Location and Commonage Act of 1879 inaugurated the formal creation of reserves—territorial enclaves demarcated for African occupation under strict state supervision.[11] These reserves served a dual purpose: to curtail resistance to land expropriation and to serve as avenues for unpaid labour for the expanding capitalist economy. Chiefs were integrated into the colonial administrative hierarchy under the logic of indirect rule, thereby transforming traditional leadership into a mechanism of colonial governance and social control. Africans residing outside these reserves encountered equally coercive forms of regulation. Prohibitions on sharecropping and labour tenancy deprived them of sustainable livelihoods, while the inability of many Boer farmers to cultivate land efficiently heightened their dependence on coerced African labour. These measures effectively stripped African producers of economic autonomy and entrenched the colonial state's monopoly over both land and labour.

2.4. The advent of the 1894 Grey Act.

The Act of 1894 introduced by Cecil John Rhodes and his secretary, Milton, constituted a legislative watershed in the formalisation of land segregation and labour exploitation. As Cousins and Claassens argue, the Act, though couched in the rhetoric of modernisation and assimilation, was in essence a mechanism designed to fragment African landholdings and generate a pool of migratory labour for the mining industry.[12] Rhodes publicly rationalised the Act as an instrument for "advancing native interests" and fostering self-reliance, but its practical implementation belied such rhetoric. All unalienated land was subdivided into small, state-supervised "locations," and occupancy was contingent upon "good behaviour."[13]

[11] M. Mulaudzi, *"Historical Analysis of the 1913 Native Land Act and Its Impact on the South African Society: Redressing Its Legacy," (Cape Town;* 2013), 2.
[12] B. Cousins and A. Claassens, *"Communal Tenure System in South Africa: Past, Present and Future,"* (2007), 367.
[13] *The Glen Grey Speech: A Transcript of Cecil John Rhodes' Speech on the Second Reading of the Grey Act to the Cape House Parliament on July 1894,* retrieved from https://sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/glen_grey_speech.pdf. Accessed 8 October 2025.

Allocations of approximately four morgens per plot were subject to gubernatorial approval, and property rights were restricted to married men, whose tenure followed primogeniture, thereby excluding women and younger men from inheritance. As Wolpe notes, this engendered the "one-man-one-plot" system—a structural constraint that ensured perpetual land scarcity and coerced Africans into wage labour.[14] The Act also entrenched a fiscal architecture of coercion. Through the Native Tax Act of 1908, African men were compelled to perform approximately ninety days of annual labour for white farmers in lieu of rent, under threat of eviction for non-compliance.[15] This convergence of taxation and forced labour institutionalised African economic dependency and reduced the majority to a subservient agrarian proletariat.

The Glen Grey Act of 1894 functioned not merely as an instrument of economic control but also as a vehicle for political disenfranchisement. The Cape Qualified Franchise of 1853 had initially established a racially inclusive, property-based suffrage predicated on liberal democratic ideals of equality and rational citizenship, as Mouton observes.[16] However, as African literacy and landholding expanded, these liberal pretensions were steadily eroded. By 1865, Africans constituted roughly 55% of the Cape population, compared with 25% whites and 20% coloureds, prompting anxieties among white elites regarding demographic and political imbalance.[17] Hofmeyr's "Onze Jan" doctrine—that Africans could only vote if they were the equals of Europeans in education, wealth, and social refinement—illustrated the overtly racialised logic underpinning the legal architecture of exclusion.[18] Rhodes, invoking paternalist rhetoric, described Africans as "citizens who were still children," contending that state guardianship over their land nullified their entitlement to political

[14] H. Wolpe, *"Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid," Economy and Society* 1, no. 4 (1972): 425–456.
[15] W.J. du Plessis, *"African Indigenous Land Rights in a Private Ownership Paradigm," Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal (PELJ)* 14, no. 7 (2011): 45–69.
[16] *The Glen Grey Speech: A Transcript of Cecil John Rhodes' Speech on the Second Reading of the Grey Act to the Cape House Parliament on July 1894,* retrieved from https://sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/glen_grey_speech.pdf. Accessed 8 October 2025.
[17] C. Walker, *"Critical Reflections on South Africa's 1913 Native Land Act and Its Legacies: Introduction," Journal of South African Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014): 655.
[18] Ibid.

representation.[19] Thus, the conjunction of land legislation and electoral restriction ensured that Africans remained both economically marginalised and politically voiceless.

2.5. Colonial Foundations of the Act of 1913

The Act must therefore be understood not as a historical aberration but as the juridical culmination of a centuries-long process of conquest, expropriation, and racialised governance. From the initial Dutch settlement to the consolidation of the British imperial state, and later the mineral revolution, each epoch incrementally codified the dispossession of African land and the commodification of African labour. Colonial rule was animated by intertwined political and economic imperatives: the maintenance of white agricultural hegemony, the subordination of African labour, and the institutionalisation of segregationist ideology. Agriculture, which, in the precolonial period, formed the backbone of indigenous economies, was systematically restructured to serve European capital accumulation. Fertile land, once communally managed, was appropriated for commercial production, while the colonial state extended subsidies, infrastructural investment and protective tariffs to white farmers. Concurrently, Africans were confined to barren reserves, forcibly transformed from autonomous producers into wage-dependent labourers. At the core of these developments lay the imperatives of capitalist expansion and racial control. The colonial state's dependence on inexpensive African labour for the agricultural and mining sectors necessitated a comprehensive apparatus of coercion, including pass laws, punitive taxation and the surveillance of mobility. These measures fractured African social structures, relegating women and children to impoverished reserves while men were absorbed into migratory labour circuits.

The colonial administration's segregationist project was inseparable from the logic of capitalism, which redefined land as a commodity and delegitimised indigenous tenure systems as "primitive." By transforming communal ownership into private property monopolised by whites, the colonial economy excluded Africans from participation in formal markets while ensuring their indispensability as a labour force. Figures such as J.W. Sauer justified the Native Land Bill as a response to the so-called "native problem" and a guarantor

[19] *The Glen Grey Speech: A Transcript of Cecil John Rhodes' Speech on the Second Reading of the Grey Act to the Cape House Parliament on July 1894,* retrieved from https://sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/glen_grey_speech.pdf. Accessed 8 October 2025.

of social order, while its substantive objective was to extinguish African agricultural competition and institutionalise white supremacy.[20] The Act of 1913 thus represented the juridical crystallisation of a protracted history of conquest, coercion and economic subjugation. It codified into law the dispossessive logic that had governed South African society since the seventeenth century, transforming racial hierarchy into a spatial, political, and economic reality. Through the systematic restriction of African land ownership, the regulation of labour, and the denial of political rights, the Act entrenched the material foundations of apartheid long before its formal inception. The enduring legacies of this historical process—territorial inequality, economic dependency, and social fragmentation—continue to define South Africa's contemporary struggles for restitution, justice, and sovereignty over land.

2.6. Implementation of the controversial Act

The Act allocated the majority of land to white South Africans, effectively dispossessing millions of indigenous communities of their ancestral territories and confining them to marginal reserves comprising only seven percent of the country's land. This legislation entrenched racial inequality and established a system of enduring social displacement and economic subjugation. African communities had long been active in agriculture and livestock production; for example, in the Cape Colony and Natal, black farmers successfully cultivated crops such as maize, wheat, and vegetables for local and regional markets, while also raising cattle that competed with settler herds.[21] The Act explicitly sought to limit competition from African populations in agriculture and land ownership. Walker observes that the legislation was designed to restrict native acquisition and benefit from land. By codifying these restrictions, the South African government then obtained powers to control land distribution and address what colonial authorities termed the "Native question." According to SAHO, the Act was to restrict natives from acquiring and benefiting from land. Beinart and Delius argue that the legislation aimed to preserve existing land occupation patterns, reinforcing white supremacy.[22] While historians note that the Act served to formalise segregation and elevate

[20] Ibid.
[21] W. Beinart and P. Delius, *"The Historical Context and Legacy of the Native Land Act of 1913,"* in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014): 668.
[22] W. Beinart and P. Delius, *"The Historical Context and Legacy of the Native Land Act of 1913,"* in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014): 668.

white dominance, its implementation combined legal regulation, coercion, and bureaucratic oversight, laying the structural foundations for enduring socio-economic disparities.

A significant bureaucratic instrument for enforcing the Act was the Native Lands Commission, chaired by Sir William Beaumont. The Commission was charged with surveying land and establishing permanent territorial boundaries between Black and white populations. This process forcibly confined Black communities to small, overcrowded areas, ensuring that fertile and economically productive land remained under white control and reinforcing racial and economic hierarchies. New laws were introduced, making it illegal for them to rent or live on land owned by whites. This legal instrument effectively dismantled existing arrangements, limiting African autonomy and control over land resulted in losing their substantial portion of income**.** The prohibition forced many African tenant farmers off the land, pushing them into poverty.

The Act further prohibited indigenous people in the country from occupying, purchasing, leasing or otherwise acquiring land outside designated reserves, as specified in Section 1(1)(a). Existing sharecropping arrangements and tenant farming agreements were terminated, stripping African farmers of both land and income and forcing many into poverty.[23] This was deliberately implemented to undermine the economic prospects of socio-economy of Africans. These measures effectively dismantled African autonomy over land and transformed communities into a readily exploitable labour force. Wolpe emphasises that the Act was designed to address a labour shortage on white farms while preventing Africans from accumulating capital or engaging in independent economic activity. Although Africans could buy or sell land within designated reserves, white ownership in these areas was prohibited, deliberately undermining African economic potential.

Subsequent to the Act, NTLA of 1936 represented a further institutionalisation of territorial segregation and state control over African landholding. The Act ostensibly sought to address the acute overcrowding within African reserves by extending and administrating *Trust land*, thereby replacing individual African land ownership with state-controlled trust tenure. In reality, it consolidated government authority over African settlement patterns, land utilisation, and mobility, entrenching mechanisms of dispossession and subordination. The legislation

[23] H. Wolpe, *"Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid,"* in *Economy and Society* 1, no. 4 (1972): 467.

facilitated widespread forced removals and the systematic reconfiguration of South African space along racialised lines. Under the Act, the United National South African Party, government established rural and urban zones, a legal and spatial architecture that reserved urban areas for whites while confining Africans to peripheral townships and "locations." African residence in white areas was permitted only on the condition of labour necessity, effectively tethering habitation rights to economic exploitation. This system institutionalised spatial segregation through the establishment of SADT and the demarcation of self-governing "native territories." It purported to alleviate the "land shortage crisis" within the reserves by designating additional land for African occupation. However, as Beinart and Delius observe, although it was professed that more land would be allocated to Africans, it took more than twenty-three years for the state to augment the original seven percent of land reserved under the 1913 Act by a mere six percent.[24] This minimal increase underscored the government's reluctance to redress the inequitable distribution of land or dismantle the structural foundations of racial agrarian inequality.

The Act's official objectives included the administration of Trust land and the regulation of settlements. Yet, its substantive function was the termination of African individual land ownership, replacing it with state-mediated system of tenure in trusts under the auspices of SADT. The Trust assumed responsibility for holding all land "for the benefit of the natives," but in practice it became an instrument of state surveillance and control. Through this mechanism, the government dictated the terms of African habitation—determining *where* individuals could live, *under what conditions*, and *for what purposes*. Permission was required for occupation or cultivation, and numerous bureaucratic restrictions rendered Africans perpetual tenants of the state rather than proprietors of their ancestral lands. As Van Wyk explains, the Act divided African-designated areas into rural and urban sectors. The rural component comprised the territories administered by the South African Development Trust, alongside so-called self-governing territories and the later TBVC states, which would serve as the cornerstone of apartheid's *Bantustan* policy. The urban sector, by contrast, was legally designated as "white space," from which Africans were excluded except as temporary sojourners in townships or hostels adjacent to industrial zones, contingent upon possession

[24] William Beinart and Peter Delius. "The Historical Context and Legacy of the Natives Land Act of 1913." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014): 668.

of valid work permits. The remainder of the country's arable and infrastructurally developed land remained under the dominion of the white minority.

White-controlled urban areas were governed directly by the central and municipal administrations, endowed with superior infrastructure, including sewage systems, potable water, paved roads, electricity, street lighting, and waste disposal. African settlements, conversely, were systematically deprived of such amenities, reinforcing economic dependency and spatial inferiority. It entrenched a dual economy in which white prosperity was sustained through the deliberate underdevelopment of African communities. The implementation of this Act coincided with the ideological consolidation of racial segregation under the National Party's apartheid policy following its electoral victory in 1948.

Apartheid represented a comprehensive system of racial domination that radicalised pre-existing segregationist frameworks into a totalising doctrine of state governance. It extended and deepened the logic of the 1936 Act by imposing an explicit racial taxonomy on all aspects of social, economic and political life. The Group Areas' Act of 1950 empowered the state to retroactively rezone urban districts, demolish homes, and expel residents whose racial classification no longer aligned with newly designated areas. In consequence, hundreds of thousands of individuals—African, Coloured and Indian—were forcibly uprooted, their families and communities fragmented, and their livelihoods destroyed. The retroactive application of the Act permitted the legalised dispossession of established neighbourhoods, transforming multiracial urban spaces into racially exclusive enclaves.

The cumulative effect of NTLA of 1936 and subsequent apartheid legislation was to perfect the mechanisms of territorial segregation, economic marginalisation, and political disenfranchisement. Through the consolidation of state-controlled tenure, the curtailment of African mobility, and the imposition of racially exclusive zoning laws, these measures ensured the perpetuation of white economic dominance and the systematic underdevelopment of Black South Africans. The spatial, economic, and social distortions produced by this legislative architecture persisted well beyond the formal end of apartheid, leaving a legacy of inequality and dispossession.

The consequences of the 1913 Act were compounded under the apartheid regime, which introduced a suite of laws to intensify segregation and oppression. These included GAA of

1950 and 1966, the BSA Act of 1959, and a series of policies regulating movement, employment, education, and political participation. Africans were prohibited from voting, denied access to high-wage employment, and subjected to pass laws that restricted freedom of movement. Education and healthcare were deliberately under-resourced in Black areas, further limiting opportunities for socio-economic advancement. These measures systematically excluded Black South Africans from accessing land, wealth, and resources, while consolidating white economic and political dominance.

The passing of the Act of 1913 did not proceed uncontested; rather, it provoked fierce resistance among indigenous people who recognised the legislation as a deliberate mechanism to entrench racial subjugation and dispossession. Far from being a passive or acquiescent population, African people mobilised vigorously against the growing edifice of segregationist policy that accompanied colonial rule. Opposition to the Act drew upon a much longer genealogy of African political consciousness and organisation that had developed since the late nineteenth century. These movements sought to challenge the denial of African land rights, citizenship and dignity through political, educational, and social mobilisation. One of the earliest expressions of this political awakening emerged in 1879 with the formation of the Native Educational Association (NEA), an organisation established to advance African access to education and social welfare. The NEA laid the foundation for subsequent bodies such as Imbumba YamaNyama (IYN), which sought to unite Africans under a shared political identity and to campaign for national rights. As evidence suggests, Imbumba YamaNyama gained significant traction in the Eastern Cape. However it did not last long and gave rise to the South African Association and the Tembu Association as well as other organisations such as the Transvaal Native Congress in 1905 (TNC) as well as the African People's Organisation (1903).[25] These organisations made effort in coordinating black action as it gave rise to the Gcuwa Mutual Improvement Society and black news-papers such as the *Imvo Zabantsundu* and *Izwi Labantu* where they aired their grievances about the liquor laws, location regulations, pass laws and maladministration in black courts. Those organisations strengthened black unity through their liberal ideological framework.[26] These organisations collectively fostered a burgeoning political consciousness among the African intelligentsia and professional classes, who began to articulate an early vision of national unity grounded in justice, equality, and political participation.

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

In the formative period of resistance, African leaders and intellectuals utilised print culture and civic networks to articulate their grievances and aspirations. The Gcuwa Mutual Improvement Society and similar institutions promoted dialogue, debate, and self-education, fostering a generation of politically engaged Africans who sought redress through constitutional and reformist means. Such developments reflected the rise of a liberal, yet assertive, ideological framework that blended African solidarity with appeals to imperial notions of justice and civilisation. It was in this context that teachers, journalists, interpreters, clergy and other educated Africans who believed in pursuing equality through peaceful negotiation and moral persuasion came together. Their principal objectives were to protect African land rights, to resist further territorial restrictions, and to extend the Cape's qualified franchise, which limited voting rights to property-owning and educated Africans. At its core, the SANNC, which was formed in 1912, sought to advance racial equality before the law and to cultivate a sense of national unity among Africans fragmented by colonial boundaries.[27]

Among the most vocal critics of the law of 1913 was John Langalibalele Dube, the first president of the SANNC. Dube denounced the legislation as a deliberate attempt to "keep Africans down," articulating the sense of betrayal and outrage that reverberated across the country. In his newspaper *Ilanga Lase Natal*, Dube appealed to white people to return to where they came from. His message captured not only the economic violence of the Act but also its psychological and moral implications—the transformation of Africans from autonomous landholders into a subordinated labour force serving white capital.[28] Resistance to the Land Act took shape primarily through nonviolent and constitutional means, reflecting both the SANNC's ideological orientation and the material constraints of the time. Africans organised peaceful protests, public meetings, and petitions in regions such as Transvaal, Natal, and the Eastern Cape. A major protest was convened on 9 May 1913 attended by Advocate Alfred Mangena, Dr. C. H. Hagger and Saul Msane. The meeting discussed the implications of the Land Bill and deliberated strategies for opposing it. A subsequent gathering at the Durban racecourse in late May reiterated these efforts, and delegations were

[27] B. Nel and G. van der Westhuizen, *The Long March: The Story of the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa: Resistance by the SANNC and the ANC between 1912 to 1960* (Pretoria: Kagiso/Haum, 2023), 10.
[28] Dube Lase Natal

dispatched to J. W. Sauer to plead for the Bill's rejection.[29] Despite such attempts to dissuade this initiative, the SANNC persisted, affirming its commitment to advocacy, solidarity and resistance.

The SANNC's early activism laid the ideological and organisational foundations for what would later become the ANC, a movement that continued to articulate and expand the struggle for equality well into the apartheid era. The resistance against the 1913 Land Act thus represented not only a reaction to immediate dispossession but also a crucible for modern African nationalism, forging political strategies and discourses that would shape South Africa's liberation trajectory throughout the twentieth century. Introduced in 1948, the apartheid regime entrenched racial hierarchy through an intricate web of laws designed to control every facet of non-white life. Africans were denied political participation, disenfranchised from Parliament, and subjected to pass laws that regulated movement and employment. Labour rights were curtailed through anti-strike legislation, and economic policies confined Africans to low-wage, menial, and hazardous work, ensuring their economic dependency. Education and healthcare were equally racialised; the Bantu Education Act of 1953 institutionalised inferior schooling intended to prepare Africans solely for subservient roles, while health facilities in African areas suffered chronic underfunding, poor infrastructure, and neglect. These structural inequalities not only degraded living conditions but also perpetuated the ideology of African inferiority upon which apartheid depended.

The psychological and socio-economic consequences of the 1913 Land Act were enduring and devastating. By severing Africans from their ancestral land, the Act destroyed traditional economies, dislocated communities, and eroded the cultural and spiritual foundations of African society. Land, as the principal means of production and social security, was systematically withheld from the majority, rendering them dependent on wage labour within a racially stratified economy. The resulting poverty, social disintegration, and inequality became defining features of South African society. In essence, the Act of 1913 institutionalised the racial segregation of land, inaugurating a system of economic exploitation and political exclusion that endured for generations. It transformed Africans from

[29] Ibid.

proprietors of land into tenants of the state and labourers for white capital, while simultaneously legitimising white supremacy under the guise of law. The Act's legacy is thus one of dispossession, impoverishment, and enduring inequality, marking it as one of the most destructive instruments of colonial governance in South African history. Its effects transcended the immediate economic realm, shaping the country's social and psychological fabric in ways that continue to reverberate long after its formal repeal.

CHAPTER THREE

Enduring Economic Impact of the Native Land Act of 1913 in South Africa

3.1. Introduction

While much of the scholarship on the 1913 Native Land Act has focused on its legal and economic dimensions, this chapter contends that a detailed empirical examination of its implementation is essential to understand how the Act concretely shaped African rural life and entrenched racialised structures of power. By drawing directly on parliamentary debates, Natives Land Commission reports, missionary correspondence, and vernacular

and English-language newspapers, the chapter reconstructs the uneven enforcement of the Act, the discretionary power of local administrators, and the practical mechanisms through which African access to land and livelihoods was restricted. It demonstrates that the Act was not merely an administrative measure but a tool of racial capitalism, which restructured African rural economies, reinforced white agrarian dominance, and recalibrated state authority over mobility, labour, and land use.

The chapter follows a thematically structured progression to provide clarity and analytical coherence. It begins by examining the mechanisms of enforcement, highlighting how administrative posts, permits, and bureaucratic discretion shaped the application of the Act. It then explores patterns of African displacement and changing tenancy regimes, showing how forced removals and restrictions on land tenure disrupted traditional agricultural production. A subsequent section analyses conflicts around sharecropping and rural labour, demonstrating how economic and social relations were transformed to serve settler interests. Finally, the chapter situates these findings within the broader structures of state power, illustrating how the implementation of the Act consolidated racialised governance and entrenched economic inequalities.

Through this progression, the chapter argues that understanding these processes provides a crucial empirical foundation for analysing the long-term social, cultural, psychological, and gendered consequences of dispossession, which are often overlooked in studies focused narrowly on legal or economic factors. By situating district-level enforcement within broader ecological, demographic, and political contexts, the chapter also highlights spatial and regional variation, demonstrating that the impacts of the Act were shaped by both structural constraints and local contingencies. In doing so, Chapter 3 contributes to the dissertation's central argument: that an interdisciplinary, historically grounded, and community-informed approach is necessary to grasp the multidimensional legacy of the 1913 Act and to inform contemporary debates on land reform, restitution, and social justice.

The Native Land Act of 1913 [hereafter referred to as "the Act"] was a significant legislation in our country. The Act establishing a framework of racialised land dispossession that continues to shape patterns of land ownership, economic opportunity and social inequality. By legally confining indigenous people to designated "native

reserves," the Act restricted ownership rights, predetermined settlement patterns, limited access to productive land and hindered long-term wealth accumulation. The economic legacies of this Act remain pervasive, manifesting in skewed land ownership, persistent poverty and limited agricultural productivity. Blacks continue to be vastly underrepresented in land ownership.[30] Wegerif et al. (2020) emphasise that land inequality encompasses not only the size of landholdings but also tenure security, land value and productivity, highlighting how historical dispossession under colonial and apartheid legislation continues to dictate access to productive land and the benefits derived from it.[31] Efforts at land redistribution and restitution since 1994 have achieved limited and uneven progress. While national statistics provide a broad perspective, more localised evidence reveals the human dimension of this inequality. Former homelands and communal tenure areas, originally designated under colonial and apartheid legislation, continue to host communal or unsurveyed land, often without formal title deeds. This lack of secure ownership reduces opportunities for investment, limits access to credit and undermines the capacity of residents to leverage land as a capital asset. In the Eastern Cape, particularly in the Hlankomo and Joe Gqabi district, poor infrastructure exacerbates these challenges. Roads, services and access to markets remain inadequate, increasing transportation costs and constraining opportunities for employment, education and healthcare.

Agricultural productivity is closely tied to historical land distribution. The most fertile and well-serviced commercial farmland remains predominantly in the hands of whites or white-dominated trusts and companies, while Black-owned land is generally located in less fertile, poorly serviced and marginal areas. This skew limit both agricultural output and the potential for wealth accumulation, reflecting the enduring economic consequences of the Act. These patterns illustrate that the mechanisms through which the 1913 Act continues to exert influence are multi-faceted, including the historical confinement of black people to reserves, unequal land quality and limited property rights, which collectively impede economic advancement.

[30] Wegerif, Marc, et al., "Land Inequality Trends and Drivers," *MDPI*, 2020.
[31] Government of South Africa, *Land Tenure and Communal Areas Reports*.

Recent empirical research highlights these structural consequences. In Emmaus (KwaZulu-Natal) and Thaba Nchu (Free State), Mathinya, Franke and colleagues (2023) surveyed 132 households farming on communal land with no formal ownership. Farming contributed only a small portion of household income, with off-farm work providing the primary livelihood. Constraints included labour shortages, limited capital and insufficient inputs, suggesting that merely increasing land size would not resolve poverty or stimulate growth. These patterns directly reflect the enduring effects of historical land dispossession and tenure insecurity. In a related study, only 23 percent of respondents in former homelands aspired to farming as a business, while 77 percent preferred non-farm livelihoods, citing limitations such as lack of capital, tenure insecurity, and restricted market access. This demonstrates a significant misalignment between rural development policies, which assume that agriculture can drive growth, and the realities of households whose farming potential is constrained by historical dispossession.

The spatial legacy of former Bantustans is further documented by the Growth Lab report (Harvard, 2022), which shows that these areas remain significantly poorer, isolated and under-serviced, with limited access to infrastructure and investment. Spatial exclusion, established decades ago, continues to impede economic opportunities and perpetuate poverty. Even when redistribution targets are met, new beneficiaries often operate under less favourable conditions, including smaller plots, lower capital and inferior access to markets, relative to established white commercial farmers. Insecure land tenure further compounds vulnerability, particularly to climate-related shocks. Households without formal land rights are less likely to invest in soil conservation, infrastructure or adaptive farming strategies, reinforcing the economic disadvantages imposed by historical dispossession.

3.2. The Enduring Economic Legacies of the Act of 1913

The Act is widely acknowledged as one of the most far-reaching and destructive pieces of legislation in South Africa’s history. Its effects are not confined to the past; they reverberate into the present, shaping patterns of ownership, poverty, and opportunity. More than a century later, despite decades of democracy and land reform, the Act’s economic legacy continues to structure the lives of millions of people in Mzansi. Recent land audits, studies of communal tenure areas, and qualitative case studies all point to the persistence of the structural inequalities that the Act entrenched, demonstrating how dispossession has left legacies that continue to undermine the economic position of Black communities today. The

most striking pieces of evidence of the enduring legacy of the Act comes from national-level data.[32] The racial skew in ownership is staggering, particularly when one considers that land is not just a physical asset but a source of wealth, social security and intergenerational opportunity. These findings confirm what observers have long argued: that the patterns of ownership created by the 1913 Act have proven remarkably resilient, even in the face of post-1994 reform efforts. Secondly, the Land Audit aligns with the findings of broader analyses such as Wegerif et al.'s 2020 study of land inequality. Wegerif and colleagues argue that land inequality is not only about the number of hectares owned but also about the value, productivity, and tenure security of land.[33] It is precisely in these dimensions that the legacy of the 1913 Act is most evident. Land in former "native reserves" (later homelands) is often less fertile, more remote, and less well-serviced than land historically reserved for whites. Moreover, much of it is held under communal tenure without formal deeds or survey, which severely limits its use as collateral or as a means of attracting investment. In this way, the Act's initial exclusion of Africans from land ownership has continued to limit their economic opportunities, not only through outright dispossession but also by shaping the quality and security of the land they could occupy.

Thirdly, studies of communal tenure areas provide further insight into how these structural inequalities persist. These areas, originally designated as "native reserves" under the 1913 Act and expanded under apartheid, remain among the most underdeveloped parts of South Africa. Residents often lack formal title deeds, reducing their ability to use land as an asset or to access credit for investment. The lack of secure property rights directly undermines land's potential as a lever for economic empowerment. Moreover, these areas tend to be poorly serviced by infrastructure, a fact vividly illustrated by research in the rural Eastern Cape. A study of the Hlankomo and Joe Gqabi districts found that inadequate roads, limited access to markets, and deficient public services make it extremely difficult for residents to convert landholding into economic opportunity.[34] Here again, the historical legacy is evident: the settlement patterns created by the 1913 Act and reinforced by apartheid planning continue to translate into higher costs, greater isolation, and fewer opportunities for the people living in these areas.

[32] Government of South Africa, *Land Audit Report 2017*, Department of Rural Development and Land
[33] Wegerif, Marc, et al., "Land Inequality Trends and Drivers," *MDPI*, 2020.
[34] Ibid.

The problem is compounded by the fact that the quality of land itself is often inferior in former homeland areas. The best commercial farmland remains concentrated in white ownership, while black-owned land is frequently located in less fertile and less well-serviced regions. This dynamic ensures that even when Black South Africans possess land, their ability to generate agricultural income or to accumulate wealth is severely constrained. Studies of chronic poverty reinforce this point: households in rural areas, often located in former homeland or trust land, remain poor over long durations precisely because of the structural constraints of land size, quality and tenure security.[35] Case studies of restitution further illustrate how the legacies of the Native Land Act continue to shape economic outcomes. For instance, research by Manenzhe and Lahiff on the Munzhedzi, Ximange, and Mavungeni Communal Property Associations in Limpopo shows that land restitution alone does not automatically transform livelihoods.[36] Many beneficiaries continued to live in poverty and unemployment, relying on multiple sources of income to supplement what little the land could provide. Problems of governance within the Communal Property Associations further restricted productivity. For many, the restoration of land did restore dignity and a sense of belonging, yet it also generated frustration as expectations of improved services and livelihoods went unmet. The study demonstrates that the legacy of dispossession cannot be easily undone: even when land is returned, the structural inequalities entrenched by the 1913 Act continue to limit its productive potential.

A similar picture emerges from a more recent study of restitution beneficiaries in the Waterberg District Municipality, conducted by Tjale, Mwale and Kilonzo.[37] This study found that most beneficiaries complained about lack of improvement in their income or standard of living after receiving land. Ownership did not translate into prosperity because of a lack of agricultural extension services, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and the absence of basic implements. While many beneficiaries expressed pride in regaining land and recognised the symbolic value of restitution, these psychological and social benefits were often accompanied by disappointment. Land alone was not enough to overcome the

[35] Frontiers, “Eastern Cape Infrastructure & Spatial Inequality Study.”

[36] Tshililo Manenzhe & Edward Lahiff, “Restitution and post-settlement support: Three case studies from Limpopo,” UWC Scholar, 2007.

[37] M.M. Tjale, M. MwaleM and B. M. Kilonzo, “Can Restitution Change Lives of Farm Beneficiaries? Case of Waterberg District Municipality, South Africa,” *South African Journal of Agricultural Extension* 50, no. 1 (2022): 45–67.

structural obstacles created by dispossession: without capital, training, and institutional support, restituted land could not become a viable basis for economic empowerment.

Recent empirical research further underscores these dynamics. Mathinya, Franke and colleagues' 2023 study found that households farmed under communal tenure without formal ownership and relied heavily on non-farm income sources such as temporary work and remittances.[38] Farming was typically small-scale and supplementary, constrained by labour shortages, limited capital, and inadequate inputs. The structural underinvestment in these areas, rooted in their historical status as reserves, meant that simply increasing land size would not resolve poverty.

The insecurity of tenure, poor infrastructure and lack of market access discouraged households from viewing agriculture as a viable pathway, further illustrating the depth of dispossession's long-term consequences. Spatial inequality remains a key aspect of the Act's legacy, as the Harvard Growth Lab report on former Bantustans demonstrates. The report shows that these areas remain significantly poorer, more isolated, and less serviced than other parts of South Africa.[39] This persistence of spatial exclusion underscores how historical patterns of land allocation continue to determine present-day development outcomes. Similarly, economic modelling by Mosoma and colleagues in 2023 showed that land reform policies have only minimal aggregate economic effects unless accompanied by substantial support services.[40] Redistribution without recapitalisation or extension services cannot close the productivity gap that separates new Black farmers from historically advantaged white commercial farmers.

Even contemporary challenges such as climate vulnerability are shaped by the legacies of the 1913 Act. Recent research has found that insecure tenure in rural communal areas undermines households' ability to adapt to climate shocks.[41] Without formal ownership or secure rights, farmers are less likely to invest in soil conservation, erosion control, or durable infrastructure. This vulnerability is particularly acute in provinces where formerly

[38] V.N. Mathinya & M. Franke, et al., "Can Small-Scale Farming Systems Serve as an Economic Engine in the Former Homelands of South Africa?" *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 7 (2023): 1–20.
[39] Growth Lab/Harvard, "Places, People and Policies in South Africa's Former Homelands," (Cambridge, MA: 2022).
[40] Mosoma, Bohlmann, Ntombela, and van Eyden, "Quantifying the Economic Effects of Land Reform Policy in South Africa: A Computable General Equilibrium Analysis," University of Pretoria (2023).
[41] "Land Tenure, Inequality and Climate Vulnerability," Climate Change Writers (post-2024)

dispossessed lands dominate, demonstrating once more how the legal exclusions of 1913 continue to produce tangible economic consequences. Finally, qualitative and interview-based studies highlight the psychological and social dimensions of this enduring economic legacy. The Land Restitution Evaluation Study conducted by UCT and SALDRU has captured beneficiary perceptions of restitution, including spatial inequality and cognitive outcomes.[42] Former minister (now Speaker of National Assembly) Thoko Didiza has publicly acknowledged that land dispossession eroded family structures, identity, and social cohesion, compromising psychological well-being across generations.[43] Other qualitative research, such as Mabapa and Ngoepe's 2023 study of restitution claimants, shows how bureaucratic barriers, such as missing or inaccessible archival records, further disempower claimants and delay redress.[44] Meanwhile, Bernadette Atuahene's 2024 study found that while financial compensation occasionally allowed recipients to invest in housing with long-term benefits, in many cases it did not lead to lasting improvement, underscoring the limits of restitution as a remedy for deep-seated structural inequality.

Taken together, the sources show that the Act of 1913 continues to shape our country's economic landscape in profound ways. National land audits reveal the persistence of skewed ownership; studies of communal tenure areas demonstrate how insecurity and remoteness perpetuate poverty; case studies of restitution highlight the limited transformative potential of land transfers without adequate support; and qualitative research illustrates the psychological scars that dispossession has left across generations. The evidence is overwhelming that the legacies of 1913 are not simply historical—they remain embedded in the structures of landholding, infrastructure, and livelihoods that define South Africa's present. Undoing this legacy requires far more than legal restitution or redistribution. It demands comprehensive investment in infrastructure, tenure reform, credit access, extension services, and psychological healing. Until these deeper structural issues are addressed, the shadow of the 1913 Act will continue to fall heavily across South Africa's economic and social life.

Qualitative evidence further reinforces these conclusions. The Land Restitution Evaluation Study (UCT/SALDRU) captures beneficiary perceptions of spatial inequality, cognitive

[42] UCT/SALDRU, *Land Restitution Evaluation Study* (ongoing)
[43] SA News, "Study Reveals Restorative Impact of Land Restitution," remarks by Minister Thoko Didiza.
[44] Mabapa and Ngoepe, "Empowering or Disempowering? Archives as a Tool to Support or Hinder Land Restitution in South Africa," *SAGE Journals* (2023).

outcomes, and socio-economic challenges following restitution.[45] SA News reports on the psychological and social effects of dispossession, noting that the erosion of family and community cohesion undermined well-being and hope for many descendants of dispossessed households.[46] Mabapa and Ngoepe (2023) document the disempowering effects of archival challenges on restitution claimants, while Atuahene (2024) illustrates that financial compensation can produce beneficial outcomes in some cases, depending on context and the manner in which the compensation is used.[47]

Across these multiple lines of evidence, the economic legacies of the 1913 Native Land Act are unmistakable. Communal tenure and insecure land rights limit the ability of households to leverage land as a capital asset. Limited agricultural productivity in former homelands and reserves necessitates dependence on off-farm work. Aspirational gaps among rural youth reflect the low economic returns associated with constrained land. Spatial and infrastructural disadvantages, including remoteness and poor service delivery, continue to impede access to markets, education, and healthcare. Collectively, these factors demonstrate that the Native Land Act of 1913 created structural conditions whose effects continue to constrain economic opportunity, perpetuate inequality, and shape contemporary South African society.

3.3. Land Dispossession and Persistent Poverty

The 1913 Act dispossessed Black South Africans of fertile land, often forcibly removing families and confiscating property. This legal exclusion created a pattern of landlessness that compelled many African households into wage labour on White-owned farms, mines, and urban industries, establishing long-term dependency. National statistics illustrate the enduring consequences of this dispossession. The 2017 Land Audit reported that of approximately 37 million hectares of individually owned farms, White individuals controlled more than 26 million hectares, while Africans owned only 1 million 300 thousands.[48] This

[45] UCT/SALDRU, *Land Restitution Evaluation Study* (ongoing).
[46] Ibid.
[47] Mabapa and Ngoepe, “Empowering or Disempowering? Archives as a Tool to Support or Hinder Land Restitution in South Africa,” *SAGE Journals* (2023).
[48] Government of South Africa, *2017 Land Audit* (Pretoria: Department of Rural Development & Land Reform, 2017)

historical exclusion from productive land remains a central driver of economic inequality, as land represents one of the most stable and transferable forms of wealth.

Empirical research further shows that restitution of land does not automatically translate into improved livelihoods. In Waterberg District, Limpopo, a survey of 289 restituted farm beneficiaries found that 98.5 per cent reported no significant change in household economic status following restitution.[49] Key constraints included insufficient start-up capital, inadequate agricultural extension services, lack of implements, poor market access and internal governance disputes. Similarly, CPAs in Limpopo — Munzhedzi, Ximange and Mavungeni — demonstrate that communal restitution often produces symbolic or legal recognition but limited immediate economic gains. Ethnographic investigations into the Ebenhaeser land restitution case in the Eastern Cape reveal this underlying tension. One participant reflected that witnessing the children of the Ebenhaeser community freely inhabiting the land of their ancestors represented not a deferred aspiration but a realised promise. However, despite this powerful symbolic restoration, transforming such victories into enduring and sustainable means of livelihood continues to pose significant challenges.

3.4. Wealth, Inequality and Intergenerational Asset Gaps

Land ownership functions as a primary vehicle for accumulating and transferring wealth across generations. By excluding Black households from ownership, the 1913 Act prevented intergenerational capital formation, denied access to commercial agriculture, and blocked opportunities to use land as collateral for credit. Contemporary analyses show that post-apartheid land redistribution has been too limited in scale and poorly supported to reverse these structural gaps. Evaluations by PLAAS and LaLR consistently report that outcomes of land restitution are modest unless accompanied by start-up inputs, secure tenure, training, and access to markets.[50] Ownership alone rarely produces the wealth-building effects necessary to offset historical dispossession. Financial restitution, as studied by Atuahene, similarly demonstrates that the impact of asset transfers depends heavily on context. Although many monetary awards did not lead to lasting economic improvement, roughly 30 per cent of recipients successfully invested in home improvements, generating long-term

[49] M.M. Tjale, M. Mwale Mand B. M. Kilonzo, “Can Restitution Change Lives of Farm Beneficiaries? Case of Waterberg District Municipality, South Africa,” *South African Journal of Agricultural Extension* 50, no. 1 (2022): 45–67.
[50] PLAAS / Chronic Poverty Research Centre, “Study of the Incidence and Nature of Chronic Poverty in South Africa,” ETH Zurich Files.

benefits. This evidence suggests the importance of support structures and informed use of resources in converting restitution into sustainable economic gains.

The Act also entrenched structural patterns of labour migration. Spatial analyses, including Harvard Growth Lab studies, indicate that former homelands remain underdeveloped, isolated and poorly serviced, perpetuating dependence on off-farm wages.[51] Small-scale farming research (2023) and rural aspirations studies (2025) report that many rural households treat farming as only a minor income source, reflecting the continued low returns of land-based livelihoods shaped by historical dispossession.[52] Although legal restitution represents an essential foundation for redress, evidence indicates that it is insufficient on its own to achieve meaningful economic transformation. Effective programmes must therefore include recapitalisation and infrastructure rehabilitation, sustained agricultural extension and skills training, conflict-sensitive governance support, and market integration with livelihood diversification to ensure lasting and inclusive development. In sum, redistribution targets alone will not address intergenerational wealth gaps without simultaneous investment in productive capacity and the broader livelihood ecosystem.

Bernadette Atuahene's research on financial restitution in South Africa reveals the heterogeneous economic outcomes associated with compensating dispossessed individuals through monetary awards rather than land transfers. Her study, based on interviews with restitution recipients, indicates that while a significant proportion of awards did not translate into enduring economic advancement, approximately 30 per cent of beneficiaries were able to leverage their compensation effectively, investing in home improvements that yielded sustained material benefits. These findings underscore that the efficacy of financial restitution is highly contingent on the manner in which compensation is utilised, as well as the broader socio-economic context in which recipients operate. [53] These findings illustrate that financial restitution can sometimes support wealth accumulation, but outcomes are highly context-dependent and contingent on how compensation is utilised.

[51] Growth Lab/Harvard, "Places, People and Policies in South Africa's Former Homelands," (Cambridge, MA: 2022).
[52] Ibid.
[53] Bernadette Atuahene, "Paying for the Past: Redressing the Legacy of Land Dispossession in South Africa," *Cambridge University Press & Assessment* (2024)

The enduring legacy of the Act of 1913 cannot be understood in the abstract alone; it is most vividly revealed in the lived realities of communities and farms where the consequences of dispossession continue to define livelihoods. National audits, such as the 2017 Land Audit, demonstrate the stark racial imbalance in landholding, with White individuals owning approximately seventy-two percent of individually held farms compared to only four percent owned by indigenous people. Yet the statistical imbalance tells only part of the story. To grasp the persistent economic, social and psychological effects of the 1913 Act, one must turn to localised case studies that show how restitution, redistribution and post-settlement realities often fall short of addressing structural inequalities entrenched more than a century ago.

3.5. Case Study 1: Munzhedzi, Ximange, and Mavungeni CPAs, Limpopo

The experiences of the Munzhedzi, Ximange, and Mavungeni communities in Limpopo illustrate how these communities were impacted by the Act of 1913. These communities received land through post-apartheid restitution, addressing claims for property taken under racially discriminatory laws. While the restitution process provided legal recognition and symbolic restoration of rights, the economic outcomes remain limited. Beneficiaries continue to rely on multiple income sources, including remittances and non-farm work, highlighting that land alone does not guarantee economic security.[54] The persistence of these constraints directly reflects the structural legacy of the 1913 Act. By legally confining Black South Africans to designated “native reserves,” the Act prevented the accumulation of valuable land assets and restricted access to fertile and well-serviced areas. Consequently, communities like Munzhedzi, Ximange, and Mavungeni inherit land that is often marginal, underdeveloped, and challenging to farm profitably. Post-settlement support remains inadequate, and governance issues within communal property associations (CPAs) exacerbate the challenges of leveraging land for economic development. These findings demonstrate that the historical exclusion imposed by Act continues to shape both the quality of land available to Black South Africans and their ability to use it as an economic asset.

3.6. Case Study 2: Waterberg District Municipality — Restituted Farms

[54] Manenzhe Tshililo & Lahiff, Edward, “Restitution and post-settlement support: Three case studies from Limpopo,” UWC Scholar, 2007.

Waterberg District in northern Limpopo exemplifies the persistent economic effects of the 1913 Act. Post-1994 restituted farms are often under-capitalised, remote and managed communally. In the Waterberg District, restitution beneficiaries highlight the limitations of ownership without adequate post-settlement support. Research by Tjale, Mwale, and Kilonzo (2022) shows that while individuals regained legal title to farms, the majority reported minimal improvement in household income. Constraints such as inadequate funding, poor access to agricultural extension services, insufficient farm implements, and underdeveloped infrastructure continue to inhibit productive use of land.[55] This scenario exemplifies how the Native Land Act's legacy persists despite restitution. The Act's original restrictions confined Black South Africans to land that was often remote, less fertile, and poorly connected to markets. As a result, even after the formal return of property, beneficiaries operate under structural disadvantages reminiscent of those imposed nearly a century earlier. The Waterberg case illustrates that land restitution, while correcting historical legal wrongs, cannot fully overcome economic disparities without accompanying investments in capital, technical support and infrastructure. It underscores the enduring spatial and resource-based inequalities created by the 1913 legislation, which continue to constrain livelihoods today.

3.7. Case Study 3: Small-Scale Farming in Emmaus (KZN) and Thaba Nchu (Free State)

Mathinya, Franke and colleagues (2023) examined small-scale farming in Emmaus and Thaba Nchu, focusing on households in former homelands with communal land tenure. None of the 132 households surveyed had formal ownership of the land they farmed, and farming often contributed only a minor portion of total household income. Off-farm work, remittances, and other income-generating strategies were critical for survival. Structural constraints such as labour shortages, limited capital and poor infrastructure prevented expansion or intensification of agricultural production.[56] These findings are a direct extension of the Native Land Act's historical impact. By confining indigenous people to designated reserves, the Act produced patterns of communal tenure, limited land rights, and unequal access to fertile or strategically located land. Even after the repeal of the Act and subsequent land reforms, these historical patterns persist. Communities in Emmaus and Thaba Nchu remain constrained by insecure tenure, poor services, and marginal land quality, demonstrating that

[55] M.M. Tjale, M. Mwale Mand B. M. Kilonzo, "Can Restitution Change Lives of Farm Beneficiaries? Case of Waterberg District Municipality, South Africa," *South African Journal of Agricultural Extension* 50, no. 1 (2022): 45–67.
[56] Ibid.

the economic disadvantages created under the 1913 legislation are deeply entrenched. This case study also illustrates how households respond by diversifying livelihoods, reflecting the low economic returns of land inherited from exclusionary policies nearly a century ago.

3.8. Case Study 4: Spatial Exclusion in Former Bantustans

A report by the Growth Lab at Harvard (2022) documented the long-term economic effects of spatial exclusion in former Bantustans, areas originally established under apartheid and earlier colonial land laws as "native reserves." These regions remain isolated, underdeveloped, and poor, with limited access to roads, schools, clinics, and markets. Economic opportunities are scarce, and the cost of participation in regional and national markets remains high.[57] This spatial marginalisation directly traces back to the Act of 1913. By legally confining indigenous people to homelands, the Act created settlement patterns that restricted mobility, limited investment, and entrenched regional inequality. Even decades after restitution and land reform programs, these areas continue to experience higher levels of poverty and underdevelopment, demonstrating the Act's enduring economic legacy. The case illustrates that historical legislation did not simply remove land; it shaped the geography of inequality, determining who could access opportunities, accumulate wealth, and participate fully in South Africa's economy.

3.9. Case Study 5: Land Reform Policy Effects and Tenure Insecurity

Mosoma, Bohlmann, Ntombela, and van Eyden (2023) employed economic modelling to showcase the economic impact of the Act in these communities. Their findings indicate that redistribution alone has minimal aggregate economic impact unless accompanied by strong support measures such as extension services, capital input, and infrastructure development. Established white commercial farmers maintain advantages in productivity, market access, and capital, while new beneficiaries operate under less favourable conditions. In addition, insecure tenure, prevalent in communal and former homeland lands, limits investment in agricultural adaptation strategies and infrastructure, leaving farmers vulnerable to climate shocks and reinforcing the cycle of disadvantage.[58] By legally limiting Black land ownership to marginal areas, the Act entrenched disparities in land quality, tenure security, and productive potential. Contemporary land reform programs, while partially addressing

[57] Growth Lab/Harvard, "Places, People and Policies in South Africa's Former Homelands," (Cambridge, MA: 2022).
[58] Ibid.

historical injustices, cannot fully overcome these entrenched constraints without additional interventions. The study demonstrates that tenure insecurity, resource limitations, and lack of infrastructure—consequences of the Act—continue to shape land use, productivity, and income generation in present-day South Africa.

3.10. Conclusion: Linking Local Evidence to the Enduring Legacy

Collectively, these case studies demonstrate the enduring economic impact of the 1913 Act. From the communal CPAs of Limpopo to restituted farms in Waterberg to the spatial isolation of former Bantustans, the Act's legacy manifests in land tenure insecurity, unequal access to fertile and well-serviced land, limited agricultural productivity, and persistent poverty. National land audits confirm that Whites continue to own the majority of individual farms, while indigenous communities remain disproportionately restricted to marginal or communal land. Case studies illustrate that restitution and land reform alone are insufficient to overcome these structural disadvantages; without adequate capital, infrastructure, technical support, and tenure security, economic outcomes remain constrained. These findings confirm that the Native Land Act's effects are neither historical relics nor symbolic; they continue to shape contemporary patterns of land ownership, wealth distribution and livelihood strategies across South Africa.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Social and Psychological Consequences of the Act of 1913.

4.1. Introduction

Chapter Four examines the social, cultural, psychological and gendered consequences of the 1913 Native Land Act. Drawing on oral testimonies, archival sources, and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks—including Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o,

Mbembe, trauma theory, and intersectional scholarship—the chapter traces both continuities and ruptures from the implementation of the Act through apartheid to contemporary South Africa. Case studies from urban and rural contexts, including Sophiatown, Cato Manor, Alexandra, the Transkei, KwaZulu-Natal and informal settlements such as eKhenana, illustrate the varied psychological, social, and gendered impacts of dispossession. The chapter argues that these psychic, cultural, social, and gendered dimensions are essential for understanding the enduring power of the Land Act and for analysing the broader structures of racial capitalism in South Africa. This perspective supports the dissertation's overarching argument that while much scholarship focuses on the legal and economic effects of the Act, its long-term social, cultural, psychological, and gendered consequences are equally critical. By highlighting these dimensions, chapter four establishes the need for an interdisciplinary, historically grounded, and community-informed approach to understanding the Act's multidimensional legacy and its relevance for contemporary debates on land reform, restitution, and social justice.

While the Act of 1913 has been extensively examined for its economic and political ramifications, its social and psychological consequences remain less thoroughly explored. Yet, the Act's prohibition of black people residing on land outside "native reserves" not only dispossessed millions of them but also ruptured the moral, emotional and symbolic foundations of community life. Beyond the material deprivation it caused, the Act constituted a profound form of *psychological and cultural violence* that destabilised family structures, eroded collective belonging and disrupted the spiritual relationship between people and land. Land, within African cosmology, was not merely an economic resource but the axis of identity, ancestry and belonging. Its loss meant not only the forfeiture of livelihood but also the erosion of dignity, autonomy and cultural continuity. Formerly self-sufficient farmers and household heads became labour tenants or wage workers on white-owned farms — a transition that inflicted deep humiliation and undermined social status and self-worth. The Act therefore produced what scholars of postcolonial trauma might describe as *psychosocial exile*: a condition in which physical dispossession becomes internalised as alienation, inferiority and a fractured sense of self and community. Thus, the Act must be understood not only as a legal mechanism of economic segregation but also as a structural assault on the psychological and social fabric of black people — an assault whose reverberations remain

visible in contemporary patterns of social fragmentation, family instability and intergenerational trauma.

4.1. Forced Removals and the Breakdown of Family Networks

One of the most socially destructive effects of the Act of 1913 was the idea that Black families were removed from their ancestral lands. Legal restrictions on ownership and tenancy forced thousands to relocate to overcrowded and infertile reserves. This dislocation severed extended kinship networks and fractured the communal structures that once sustained social cohesion and collective identity. Prior to the Act, many African rural communities were economically independent, socially cohesive and rooted in shared systems of reciprocity. Within these systems, food and labour were exchanged freely, ensuring that no member was left destitute. However, the forced migration of men to urban areas — driven by the need to earn wages — created what sociologists later termed the *dual household system*: a divided family structure where men lived and worked in urban compounds while women, children and the elderly remained in impoverished rural reserves.[59] Men's absence destabilised familial roles and emotional bonds. As Daina, a survivor of forced removals, poignantly recalled: "You had children with a person you had no relationship with" (Interview cited in Hall 2014). Her testimony humanises the collective trauma of dislocation — families fractured not only by distance but by the gradual erosion of intimacy, trust and mutual care. Generations grew up in conditions of emotional instability and material deprivation, often marked by absentee fathers, overburdened mothers and the loss of cultural continuity once transmitted through communal land-based life.

The collapse of ancestral homesteads also meant the loss of intergenerational memory. Land was a living archive of history — a repository of ancestral graves, oral traditions and agricultural rituals. When families were forcibly removed, these symbolic anchors of belonging were destroyed. The reserves, established primarily to serve as labour reservoirs rather than sustainable communities, became overcrowded zones of poverty, food insecurity and social despair. The result was a profound sense of spiritual dislocation — a loss of rootedness that extended beyond geography to encompass identity itself. Modern trauma theorists describe this as intergenerational trauma: the silent transmission of grief, shame and psychological pain across generations. The colonial and apartheid state neither

[59] H. M. Feinberg, *The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa: Politics, Race, and Segregation in the Early 20th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

acknowledged nor addressed this trauma. Instead, its policies normalised emotional suffering as an inevitable by-product of “native administration.” The unprocessed grief associated with the loss of land became embedded in everyday life — expressed in silence, self-doubt and internalised oppression.

4.2. Women and the Gendered Dimensions of Landlessness

The Act of 1913 reinforced patriarchal structures of ownership, further marginalising women’s access to land. Under both colonial and customary legal systems, women could not hold land independently but only through male relatives.[60] The Betterment policies of the 1930s deepened this exclusion by registering land exclusively under male household heads, effectively dispossessing single, widowed or divorced women. Women in the reserves bore the brunt of these changes — they became the backbone of rural survival, cultivating depleted land, caring for children and sustaining community life amid deepening poverty. As Walker (1991) observes, women served as both “economic producers and emotional anchors” in communities fractured by male absenteeism.[61] Their psychological burden was immense: they were tasked not only with survival but with preserving dignity and stability. This ongoing institutional marginalisation sustains cycles of dependency and exclusion. As Hall succinctly notes, “Power restitution without redistribution simply perpetuates existing hierarchies under different labels.”[62] The persistence of female-headed households, gender-based poverty and limited rural leadership opportunities thus testify to the continuing psychosocial impact of the 1913 Act.

4.3. Urban Migration, Alienation and the Fragmentation of Community

The collapse of rural life drove many displaced individuals to seek livelihoods in urban centres such as Alexandra and Sophiatown. Initially spaces of resilience and creativity, these townships soon became overcrowded and impoverished due to restrictive land policies. Over time, social disintegration intensified: youth alienation, substance abuse and gang culture emerged from the absence of stable family structures and the psychological residue of displacement. Mamphela attributes much of South Africa’s contemporary social crisis — from

[60] S. Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1916).
[61] C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London: Onyx Press, 1991).
[62] Ibid.

gender-based violence to generational poverty — to the long-term breakdown of the "moral economy" of land-based life.[63] The disconnection between people and their land has produced not just economic vulnerability but also a deep crisis of meaning and identity. Without the grounding of communal land, social trust eroded and with it the moral frameworks that once regulated behaviour and fostered mutual accountability.

4.4. Psychosocial Exile and Intergenerational Trauma

The psychological and cultural violence unleashed by the Act of 1913 cannot be fully understood through the language of economic deprivation alone. It must also be read through what Frantz Fanon (1967) termed the colonial wound — a psychic disfigurement produced when domination penetrates not only the body but also the consciousness of the colonised.[64] The Act functioned as an instrument of such domination: it redefined space, reordered belonging and inscribed inferiority into the daily experiences of black people. By legislating spatial exclusion and economic dependency, it rendered Black subjects strangers in their own land, thereby producing what this study terms psychosocial exile — a dual condition of physical displacement and internal alienation. By rupturing ancestral continuity and redefining African identity through spatial control, the law disrupted the ontological security that land traditionally provided. For many dispossessed communities, the land was not simply property but a repository of memory, a site where the living and the ancestral coexisted. Its loss thus entailed an existential rupture — a breaking of the "umbilical cord" that linked personhood to place, the living to the dead and history to identity.

Achille Mbembe's (2001) notion of *necropolitics* extends Fanon's argument by emphasising how spatial control operates as a form of social death. The Act of 1913 exemplified this dynamic: it did not merely restrict land access but created "zones of non-being." in the form of reserves and labour compounds where Black lives were systematically devalued.[65] Within these spaces, survival became conditional upon service to white economic interests. The social order imposed by the Act thus engineered a hierarchy of humanity — a geography of privilege and deprivation that translated into enduring feelings of inferiority, powerlessness and displacement. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) similarly situates dispossession within the

[63] Ramphele, Mamphela. *A Bed Called Home: Life in the Migrant Labour Hostels of Cape Town*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1993.
[64] Fanon, F. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by C. Farrington. New York: Grove Press.

[65] Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony.* University of California Press, 2001.

terrain of cultural and psychological alienation. His concept of colonial alienation refers to the separation of individuals from their environment, community, and language — a fragmentation that mirrors the spatial dismemberment of colonial land policies.[66] The Act of 1913 exemplified this process: it transformed communal relationships to land into individualised, commodified forms of tenancy and labour, thereby eroding the collective ethos that had sustained African societies. Ngũgĩ's argument helps frame the Act not only as an economic intervention but as a cultural project of erasure, seeking to replace indigenous worldviews of shared custodianship with the capitalist logic of ownership and exploitation.

The cumulative psychological effect of this dispossession has persisted across generations. Contemporary trauma theorists describe this phenomenon as intergenerational trauma — the transmission of unresolved grief, loss and humiliation from one generation to the next. The forced removals, disintegrated family structures, and systemic silencing of pain under apartheid created conditions in which trauma was normalised, often manifesting in cycles of silence, depression and self-doubt within Black communities. The absence of collective healing mechanisms to address the emotional and cultural dimensions of land loss — has meant that much of this trauma remains unacknowledged and unprocessed. In this sense, the enduring legacy of the Act of 1913 is not only visible in patterns of inequality or landlessness but also in the subtle, pervasive sense of unbelonging that continues to shape black people's identity. The social fragmentation and alienation documented in this chapter — from the migrant labour system and gendered land exclusion to the urban cultures of violence and despair — all point to a deeper psychic condition: a people perpetually displaced within their own country. This psychosocial exile encapsulates the long-term interior consequences of dispossession, where the trauma of land loss becomes embedded in cultural memory and carried forward as collective inheritance. To understand the Act's enduring impact, therefore, requires a reorientation from purely materialist explanations toward a more holistic reading that integrates political economy with psychology, culture, and memory. Land restitution, in this framework, must be conceived not merely as an economic redress but as a process of psychic and cultural reparation — the restoration of dignity, rootedness, and belonging to those whose inner worlds were fractured by the violence of dispossession.

[66] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: J. Currey; Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986).

4.5. Loss of Dignity and Autonomy

Land in African societies has long carried significance far beyond its economic value. It embodies the nexus of identity, spirituality and community — a space where social belonging, ancestry and autonomy converge. Before colonial intrusion, land stewardship underpinned self-sufficiency, moral order and personal dignity. Chiefs allocated land communally to ensure survival and harmony; men attained adulthood and social standing through providing land and sustenance for their families, while women's agricultural and household labour sustained the community's material and spiritual life. Land, therefore, was not a commodity but the foundation of existence — the medium through which people related to their ancestors, practiced rituals, and secured the well-being of future generations. The Act of 1913 violently disrupted this moral and social order. The Act stripped individuals and families of their independence, dignity and agency. It redefined land not as a shared inheritance but as a racialised possession, controlled by white settlers and the colonial state. As colonisers dismissed indigenous communal systems as "primitive" and "disorganised," they legitimised dispossession and replaced a moral economy of stewardship with one of exclusion and control. In doing so, they severed people from the spiritual and cultural roots that grounded their sense of identity. As the South African Human Rights Commission (2018) later observed, inadequate access to land continues to undermine human dignity and perpetuate alienation.

The erosion of dignity manifested not only in the visible poverty of dispossession but in subtle forms of psychological subjugation. Landlessness fostered feelings of helplessness, dependency and disconnection from heritage. The 2024 African Elements article "Wounded Roots" captures this persisting reality, describing how "landlessness continues as a psychological scar, symbolising disrupted continuity and fragmented identity." Similarly, historian Sandra Swart (2016) highlights how Plaatje's portrayal of dispossessed people as "roving pariahs" with "hungry cattle more pitiful than their owners" reveals a form of psychological warfare — where the suffering of animals mirrored the moral and emotional degradation of their owners.[67] This imagery underscores that dispossession was not merely economic theft; it was a process of dehumanisation designed to break spirit, will and dignity. Without land, Black people lost the ability to make fundamental life choices: where to live, farm, bury their dead or raise their children. Displaced into overcrowded reserves or

[67] Sol Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* (1916), 87.

compelled into urban labour, they became subject to the control of white landlords, mining companies and colonial administrators. This systematic dependency represented a collapse of autonomy — a shift from self-determination to enforced servitude.

4.6. Gendered Dimensions of Lost Autonomy

The deprivation of land also reconfigured gender relations and family structures. In patriarchal societies where men's social identity was closely tied to their capacity to provide through land ownership, the Act emasculated them, stripping them of symbolic authority and self-respect. Young men, unable to inherit or access land, were compelled into migrant labour or prolonged dependency on elders, delaying marriage and eroding pathways to adulthood. The resulting frustration and sense of failure often manifested as violence or social withdrawal — symptoms of what Fanon (1967) termed "the poisoned consciousness" of colonised subjects.[68] For women, the consequences were equally severe but differently gendered. Many women became the *de facto* heads of households in impoverished reserves, maintaining families under extreme hardship without legal rights to land or independent income. Their labour was indispensable yet unacknowledged, reinforcing gendered dependency and vulnerability. The combined loss of men's status and women's autonomy destabilised the family unit, further weakening community cohesion and transmitting psychological distress across generations.

4.7. Loss of Land as the Theft of the Future

Land in African societies functioned not only as a present livelihood but as a bridge between generations — a form of intergenerational wealth and continuity. Its loss was therefore a theft of the future. Plaatje (1916) recorded harrowing accounts of families evicted during the planting season, their crops confiscated and their homes destroyed. As one farmer recounted, after a tenant surrendered his harvest, he was told, "Now you must leave."[69] These acts extinguished not only livelihoods but the capacity to plan for the future, raising generations condemned to dependency and precarity. Van Wyk (2013) rightly observes that "the dispossession of land was not only a theft of the present; it was a theft of the future."[70] Without land to inherit or leverage for education and enterprise, Black people were

[68] F. Fanon (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by C. L. Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 67.
[69] Plaatje, Sol T. *Native Life in South Africa: Before and Since the European War and the Boer Rebellion.* 4th ed. London: P.S. King & Son, 1916, 85.
[70] Sol Plaatjie's Recorded Interview

systematically excluded from generational wealth accumulation. This historical rupture continues to define South Africa's racial wealth gap. The 2017 Land Audit revealed that 72 percent of agricultural land remains in white ownership, while Black South Africans, despite comprising the vast majority, own only 4 percent.[71] According to the 2025 LSE Inequality Survey, 50 percent of white people hold at least R250,000 in net wealth, compared with only 3 percent of Black people. These statistics are not simply economic markers but enduring social indicators of humiliation, exclusion and alienation — the tangible legacy of a century-old psychological and structural wound. Even post-apartheid land reforms have failed to restore autonomy. The restitution process has been slow, bureaucratic, and often symbolic rather than transformative. In cases where land has been returned, the absence of financial resources and technical support has limited sustainability. As Majola (2022) notes, genuine redress requires not just redistribution but also "knowledge, access, and mentorship," all historically denied to Black communities.[72] Thus, the landlessness codified in 1913 continues to reverberate — materially through inequality, and psychologically through a pervasive sense of exclusion and unfulfilled potential.

4.8. From Pariahhood to Internalised Oppression

Plaatje's description of black people as "pariahs in their own ancestral land" captures the dual material and psychological violence of dispossession. The term *pariah*, historically denoting the outcast or untouchable, aptly encapsulates the emotional reality of being legally rendered alien within one's homeland. To be a "pariah" was to experience what this study terms psychosocial exile — an internalised sense of unbelonging that corrodes identity and self-worth. Plaatje's lament reveals not just the sorrow of physical exile but the deeper existential displacement that accompanied it. Fanon's (1967) concept of the "poisoned consciousness" illuminates this process of internalised oppression. Through systemic exclusion, the colonised subject learns to see themselves through the eyes of the oppressor, internalising narratives of inferiority and dependence. The Act of 1913, by criminalising Black ownership and codifying subjugation, entrenched this poisoned consciousness. Children growing up in reserves or townships, far removed from ancestral lands, inherited not only

[71] Department of Rural Development and Land Reform 2017.
[72] N Ndlovu, "Trauma, Memory and the Urban Displaced: Psychological Impacts of Forced Removals." *South African Journal of Psychology* 47, no. 1 (2017): 82–95.

poverty but also a fractured sense of identity — a collective trauma that persists as silence, shame and alienation.

4.9. Continuity of Trauma under Apartheid and Beyond

The psychological and social dislocation initiated in 1913 was deepened under apartheid. Legislation such as the *GAA* (1950), *BAA* (1951), and *BEA* (1953) institutionalized exclusion, reinforcing the message that black people were outsiders in their own country. The forced removals of the 1950s and 1960s mirrored the violence of 1913, displacing millions from urban homes into remote, impoverished "homelands." Pass laws and surveillance normalised humiliation, while limited education and economic opportunity perpetuated dependency. These policies compounded what Fanon (1963) described as "the pathology of oppression" — a condition in which systemic dehumanisation becomes internalized as collective despair[73]. The cumulative effect was a deepening of intergenerational trauma. Successive generations inherited both the material deprivation and the psychological scars of alienation. The loss of land in 1913 thus marked not merely a moment in history but the beginning of a psychic disinheritance — a wound that continues to define identity, belonging and dignity in contemporary South Africa.

4.10. The Spatial and Urban Impact of the Act of 1913

The Act of 1913 was not merely an agrarian statute; it was also a foundational instrument of spatial and psychological engineering in South Africa. By confining African land ownership to roughly seven percent of the country and prohibiting tenancy elsewhere, the Act reordered both the physical and affective geographies of Black life. It forced millions into the migrant labour system, creating a population perpetually in motion yet belonging nowhere — a condition that may be understood as a form of psychosocial exile. The Act thus did more than reshape rural livelihoods; it produced enduring geographies of alienation. As the mining economy expanded, the demand for cheap labour intensified. The state and mine owners collaborated through the Native Recruiting Corporation (NRC), enforcing pass laws that transformed mobility into surveillance.[74] Men were herded into single-sex compounds or mining hostels — regimented spaces of containment that stripped away privacy, intimacy and familial life. As Wolpe observes, this system externalised the cost of reproducing African

[73] F Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks (*New York: Grove Press, 1967), 44.
[74] H.M. Feinberg, "The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa: Politics, Race, and Segregation." *The Journal of Southern African Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993): 42.

labour to the reserves while providing urban employers with a steady pool of low-paid workers.[75] Families left behind in impoverished homelands depended on meagre remittances, giving rise to fractured households, female-headed families and intergenerational poverty. These social arrangements were not accidental but central to a deliberate regime of control. Africans were treated as temporary sojourners in the city, tolerated only for their labour yet denied permanence, property, and full citizenship. The NUAA of 1923 codified this principle, allowing Black presence in towns only "as required for white economic needs." Henri Lefebvre's insight that "(social) space is a (social) product.[76]

4.11. The Growth of Segregated Urban Spaces

Despite attempts to restrict African urbanisation, the pull of economic opportunity drew thousands into cities. By the 1920s and 1930s, informal "native locations" proliferated near mines and factories. Authorities viewed these as sources of disease and disorder, prompting the establishment of racially segregated townships at city peripheries. The *NUAA* (1923) formalised influx control and segregated "locations," while the *GAA* (1950) entrenched apartheid urbanism, forcibly relocating millions. Whites occupied central, well-serviced suburbs, while Africans, Coloureds and Indians were pushed to peripheral zones, enduring long and costly commutes to work. Townships such as Alexandra (Johannesburg), Langa and District Six (Cape Town), Orlando/Soweto (Johannesburg), and Cato Manor (Durban) became overcrowded and under-serviced zones of containment. Alexandra, founded in 1912 as one of the few freehold areas available to Black people, soon faced neglect and overcrowding after the Land Act. These spaces, while sites of deprivation, also fostered vibrant cultural and political life — producing musicians, intellectuals, and resistance movements. Yet the same instability and poverty bred social fragmentation, substance abuse, and youth alienation. The township, therefore, stood as both a crucible of creativity and a geography of psychological strain — a microcosm of Fanon's "zone of nonbeing," where life persisted amid structural negation.

By the mid-twentieth century, urbanisation had far outpaced the state's capacity and willingness to provide formal housing. Harrison defines informal settlements as "shelters

[75] H Harold. "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa." *Economy and Society* 1, no. 4 (1972): 425.
[76] A.J. Christopher, *The Atlas of Apartheid (New York:* Routledge, 1994), 68.

created outside the formal housing delivery system, typically without tenure or services."[77] In Johannesburg, the number of African migrants rose from 244,000 in 1939 to 400,000 by 1946, with squatter villages multiplying.[78] In Durban, the population of Cato Manor grew from 17,000 in 1943 to 50,000 in 1950,[79] while in Pretoria, settlements such as Mamelodi expanded illegally by the late 1940s.[80] By the 1980s, vast informal settlements like Crossroads (Cape Town), Inanda (Durban) and Mamelodi (Pretoria) had become permanent features of the urban landscape — repeatedly demolished yet continually re-emerging. These spaces embodied both exclusion and defiance, revealing the resilience of the dispossessed and the persistent human search for place and community

4.12. Post-Apartheid Persistence of Spatial Inequalities

The democratic transition of 1994 sought to redress apartheid's spatial injustices through mass housing programmes. Low-cost housing was typically constructed on distant "greenfield" sites, locating new communities far from employment centres and essential services. Research by the Gauteng City-Region Observatory shows that RDP housing projects are situated an average of 7.8 km to over 20 km from central economic zones — a pattern that entrenches spatial marginalisation.[81] The financial and temporal burden of long commutes continues to weigh heavily on working-class Black households, constraining upward mobility and deepening frustration. Qualitative studies report widespread dissatisfaction with peripheral housing, inadequate services and the absence of nearby employment opportunities. In many cases, residents rent out or abandon these units, underscoring the disconnect between shelter provision and livelihood sustainability.[82] As contemporary urban studies note, this peripheralisation of poverty perpetuates the psychological geography of apartheid — communities housed, yet not integrated; present in the city, yet still socially and economically exiled. Despite the delivery of over 5.2 million subsidised homes since 1994, demand continues to outstrip supply. The White Paper on Human Settlements cites 3.4 million households on the housing waiting list and more than 3,200 informal settlements nationwide. In Khayelitsha, Diepsloot, and Duncan Village, overcrowding and inadequate services have sparked recurring protests. Movements such as

[77] Turok, Ivan. *Spatial Inequalities and Urban Development in South Africa.* HSRC Press, 2021.
[78] P Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien. *Alexandra: A History (*Wits University Press, 2008), 89.
[79] P Maylam, *Explaining the Apartheid City (*Institute for Social and Economic Research,1996), 186.
[80] D Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948–1961 (*Oxford University Press, 1991), 118.
[81]GCRO (Gauteng City-Region Observatory). *State of the GCR Report.* Johannesburg, 2022.
[82]N Mavuso and Neil Buxton, "Beyond Shelter: RDP Housing and the Question of Location." *Urban Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (2019): 54.

Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Social Justice Coalition continue to demand recognition of informal settlements as legitimate communities and to contest urban land inequality. Their activism makes visible the persistence of what Mbembe calls “necropolitical space” — zones where vulnerability and marginality are reproduced through the denial of full urban citizenship.[83]

4.13. Spatial Dispossession as Psychological Dislocation

The spatial legacies of the Act of 1913 thus extend far beyond the visible map of segregation. They constitute a psychic and cultural geography — a landscape of dislocation that continues to shape the inner life of the nation. Forced removals, fragmented family structures, and peripheral urbanisation collectively produced an enduring sense of unbelonging. To live in the township or the informal settlement is not merely to occupy marginal land; it is to inhabit a historical condition of exclusion that echoes across generations. Understanding this continuity requires reading the built environment as a materialisation of trauma. The architecture of segregation became the architecture of alienation: a system that disciplined movement, fractured community, and scripted inferiority into daily life. The Act thereby initiated a spatial order that continues to structure the affective experience of black people—of being inside the nation yet outside its promise. Spatial justice, therefore, cannot be achieved through land redistribution or housing provision alone; it must involve the restoration of psychological dignity and the reimagining of space as a site of belonging and healing.

4.14. CASE STUDIES

4.14.1. Alexandra (Johannesburg) — Urban Overcrowding, Family Fracture, Cultural Resilience

Alexandra, situated to the north of Johannesburg, stands as one of the most compelling urban case studies through which to trace the social and psychological consequences of the Act of 1913. Founded in 1912 as one of the few urban spaces where Africans could purchase freehold property, Alexandra initially offered a rare form of semi-autonomous Black urban settlement. However, the passage of the Act the following year—and the subsequent

[83] GCRO (Gauteng City-Region Observatory). *State of the GCR Report.* Johannesburg, 2022.

tightening of influx control regulations—rapidly transformed Alexandra's prospects. The Act's restriction of African land ownership to designated reserves displaced thousands who sought employment in Johannesburg's burgeoning industrial economy but were denied legal rights to settle in the city. As Bonner and Nieftagodien (2008) detail, Alexandra's population swelled dramatically during the interwar years, creating a densely populated, under-serviced settlement whose residents lived under constant threat of eviction.[84] The township's very existence challenged the state's urban racial order, and this defiance subjected its inhabitants to chronic uncertainty and anxiety, shaping a collective psychology marked by insecurity and resilience.

The social and psychological dimensions of Alexandra's development reveal how the Land Act's spatial exclusions reverberated far beyond the rural countryside. By severing African families from their land and livelihoods, the state compelled men into circular migration, producing the dual-household system in which husbands lived in single-sex hostels or rented rooms near their places of employment, while wives and children remained in the impoverished reserves. This separation fragmented kinship networks and weakened the affective bonds that underpinned traditional forms of belonging. The result was a pervasive sense of rootlessness, as households were suspended between two worlds—neither fully rural nor fully urban. The psychological toll of this split existence manifested in depression, domestic strain, and intergenerational instability. Yet Alexandra's residents also developed adaptive strategies to endure this marginalisation. Oral histories recorded by Bonner and Nieftagodien describe vibrant community networks, mutual-aid societies, and religious associations that provided emotional and material support. Cultural expression flourished in music, politics, and street performance, even as crime and substance abuse reflected the darker underside of social stress.[85]

4.14.2. Sophiatown and District Six — Forced Removals, Cultural Trauma, Erasure of Place Memory

Sophiatown and District Six stand as two of the most haunting examples of forced removals in South Africa's urban history—spaces whose destruction under apartheid traced a direct lineage to the spatial and psychological regime first established by the *Act* of 1913. Both

[84] P Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien. *Alexandra: A History (*Wits University Press, 2012), 89.
[85] Ibid.

communities were multiracial, culturally vibrant urban enclaves where African, Coloured Indian and a few white residents coexisted in defiance of segregationist planning. Their eventual demolitions in the 1950s and 1960s represented not only the material displacement of thousands but also the systematic erasure of cultural memory and communal identity. These removals, while executed under apartheid legislation such as the *GAA* of 1950, reflected the same logic of exclusion inaugurated in 1913: to separate, contain, and control African presence in the urban landscape.[86] The continuity between the Land Act and later urban removals underscores how dispossession became both a spatial and psychological process—disrupting the deep emotional geographies that tied people to place. Sophiatown, famously described by journalist and novelist *Drum* writers as "the Chicago of South Africa," was a hub of creativity, jazz, politics and Black intellectual life during the 1940s and early 1950s. Yet, beneath this exuberance lay precarity: residents held only tenuous tenure rights, their existence tolerated but never legally secured. In 1955, the apartheid state began a series of mass evictions, bulldozing homes and forcibly relocating residents to Meadowlands in Soweto.[87] The trauma of removal reverberated far beyond the physical act of demolition. Oral histories collected from former residents describe profound grief, shame, and disorientation. Elderly interviewees recalled the humiliation of watching ancestral graves destroyed, while younger generations spoke of losing the "street life" that had defined their childhood identities. This loss of place ruptured intergenerational continuity; cultural rituals, social networks and informal economies that anchored identity were abruptly severed. As one resident recalled, "We were scattered like ashes—our memories bulldozed along with our homes."[88] Such testimonies illustrate what scholars now identify as *cultural trauma*: a collective wound transmitted through memory and emotion that reshapes community consciousness long after the event.

District Six in Cape Town experienced a parallel fate. Declared a "white area" in 1966, it saw over 60,000 residents evicted to the Cape Flats, their houses razed to the ground. Field's *Lost Communities, Living Memories* (2001) documents how the destruction of District Six not only removed a physical community but also disrupted its symbolic and spiritual fabric.[89] Families were separated, churches and mosques demolished, and communal rituals of

[86] E Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue (*Johannesburg: Faber and Faber, 1984), 112.
[87] P Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, *Alexandra: A History (*Wits University Press, 2012), 112.
[88] P Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, *Alexandra: A History (*Wits University Press, 2012), 112.
[89] Ibid., 183.

death, celebration, and kinship were dislocated from the geography that had sustained them. For many, the inability to bury relatives in familiar soil or to return to ancestral gravesites symbolised a deeper psychic dislocation. Drawing on Sol Plaatje's early reflection that dispossession rendered Africans "pariahs in their own land", the experience of District Six residents a half-century later shows how such alienation persisted in new forms. The Land Act's initial legal exclusion had matured into an emotional exile: residents became strangers not only to the land but also to the urban fabric that had embodied their social existence.

The psychosocial effects of these removals were manifold. Survivors of both Sophiatown and District Six frequently reported enduring feelings of displacement, nostalgia, and identity fragmentation. Studies in community psychology suggest that forced removal generates symptoms akin to post-traumatic stress, often compounded by intergenerational transmission of grief.[90] Children raised in resettlement areas like Meadowlands and the Cape Flats inherited stories of loss that shaped their sense of self and belonging. The act of dispossession thus extended beyond property—it penetrated memory, language, and collective imagination. The symbolic violence of erasure was further reinforced by the state's renaming of places: Sophiatown became "Triomf," meaning "triumph" in Afrikaans, a cruel inversion that signified white victory over Black autonomy. This linguistic colonisation compounded the psychological harm by rewriting history on the very terrain of trauma. Yet, both sites also became focal points for *memory activism*—efforts to reclaim erased histories as acts of psychosocial repair. The District Six Museum, founded in 1994, functions not merely as a heritage site but as a therapeutic space where former residents narrate their displacement, recover family artifacts, and symbolically rebuild the community through memory.[91] Similarly, the Sophiatown Heritage and Cultural Centre engages in oral-history projects, community counselling, and youth programmes that reconnect descendants with the stories and sounds of the original township. These initiatives exemplify what sociologist Jeffrey Alexander calls "cultural trauma work," wherein collective remembrance becomes a means of healing social rupture.[92] Through these projects, memory is mobilised as resistance against oblivion—an attempt to transform grief into continuity.

[90] N Ndlovu, "Trauma, Memory and the Urban Displaced: Psychological Impacts of Forced Removals." *South African Journal of Psychology* 47, no. 1 (2017): 88.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

4.14.3. Migrant-Labour Hostels and Mining Compounds (Witwatersrand) — Institutionalised Separation and Mental Strain

The migrant-labour hostels and mining compounds on the Witwatersrand offer a vivid case study of the institutionalized separation and psychological strain wrought by the Act of 1913. The Act's restrictions confined Black South Africans to reserves and funneled men into wage labour in mines, manufacturing, and agriculture, creating a circular migratory pattern in which men were forced to live apart from their families. Hostels and single-sex compounds became the material embodiment of this separation. Ethnographic and sociological studies document how these spaces generated chronic loneliness, stress, and instability. Ramphele's seminal work details the daily life in Cape Town hostels, showing how men were subjected to surveillance, regimented schedules, and limited privacy, while simultaneously grappling with the guilt and anxiety of leaving families behind. Pirie's research on Johannesburg hostels further illustrates the cumulative psychosocial effects: the absence of fathers destabilised childhood attachments, increased domestic strain and fostered cycles of violence and substance abuse among youth. Wolpe's theoretical framing situates these phenomena within the broader political economy, showing its connection to the extraction of cheap African labour and the erosion of social cohesion in Black communities.[93] The psychological toll of hostel life extended beyond immediate stress. Men internalised feelings of emasculation and powerlessness, while women, left to maintain households in impoverished reserves, shouldered disproportionate emotional and economic burdens. This separation disrupted intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, family narratives, and land-based identity, producing what contemporary psychologists term *intergenerational trauma*. Hostels thus serve as a clear example of how the loss of land in 1913 reverberated into urban psychological harm: the architecture of labour control became a mechanism of social and psychic exile, embedding alienation into the spatial and familial fabric of Black life.

[93] H Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa." *Economy and Society* 1, no. 4 (1972): 45-72.

4.14.4. Cato Manor / eKhenana / Abahlali baseMjondolo — Evictions, Grassroots Resistance, Community Psychosocial Effects

Cato Manor in Durban and contemporary sites such as the eKhenana Commune illustrate the ongoing psychosocial impact of forced evictions and state-sanctioned displacement. Cato Manor, historically a peri-urban settlement subjected to repeated removals, and eKhenana, a contemporary land occupation project, both highlight how recurring evictions perpetuate trauma across generations. Residents of these areas confront not only material insecurity but also fear, grief and social fragmentation as a consequence of violent removals and political repression. Activist-led initiatives, such as those spearheaded by Abahlali baseMjondolo, function as sites of psychosocial repair. Community organising, collective mourning, and the defence of communal space serve as therapeutic mechanisms fostering resilience. These examples underscore the enduring psychic dimensions of land dispossession, revealing how historical policies continue to shape emotional and communal life. In contrast, restitution cases like the Makuleke community in the Pafuri Triangle demonstrate the potential for land return to foster psychological repair. Post-1994, the Makuleke successfully reclaimed ancestral land within Kruger National Park, negotiating a conservation-development model that simultaneously restored access to land and cultural practices. Evaluations indicate tangible psychosocial benefits, including reduced depression, restored ancestral rituals, and strengthened communal agency, though material and skill-based constraints limited full recovery.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate a clear causal pathway: the Act of 1913 established the spatial and institutional conditions—reserves, migrant-labour systems, and urban segregation—that fractured families, disrupted cultural continuity, and inflicted enduring psychological harm. Alexandra, the Witwatersrand hostels, Sophiatown, District Six, and Cato Manor illustrate how land exclusion produced chronic insecurity, social dislocation, and intergenerational trauma. Conversely, evidence from Makuleke and LRES shows that land restitution can reverse elements of psychosocial exile, restoring dignity, cultural practice, and social cohesion. These analyses reinforce the dissertation’s central argument that the *Native Land Act*’s legacy is as much psychological and cultural as it is economic and political.

CHAPTER FIVE

Political Impact of the Controversial Act of 1913

5.1. Introduction

The 1913 Land Act is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of racial segregation, with its economic and social consequences meticulously documented in both scholarly and popular discourse. However, the Act also functioned as a deeply political instrument, engineering the exclusion of indigenous people from the body politic and reinforcing white minority rule under the guise of land regulation. Feinberg suggests that dispossession erased both economic autonomy and the political identity necessary for full citizenship. It was not merely a rural land policy; it was a strategic mechanism of governance, control and political suppression, laying the foundation for the disenfranchisement that would later be formalised under apartheid. By restricting Black land ownership, the majority of Black people were deprived of political participation, particularly in the Cape Colony, where property ownership was tied to voting rights. This entrenched white minority rule and erased Black representation in formal governance. Yet, in silencing Black political agency, the Act also sowed the seeds of resistance and mobilisation**.** The very same act of dispossession energised African intellectuals, traditional leaders and emerging middle classes into political action. The injustices of loss of land would remain central to the ANC's agenda well into the 20th century and continue to define grassroots protest and populist politics in new South Africa.

5.2. Exclusion from Governance and Political Rights

One of the most far-reaching consequences of the Act of 1913 was its role in structurally excluding black people from formally participating in politics**.** The Act functioned as a calculated political tool, not just a rural land measure because it simultaneously denied millions of people the political franchise that was historically connected to property ownership. This furthered white minority domination and paved the way for future legislation that completely stripped indigenous communities of citizenship rights. Prior to 1913, the Cape Colony operated under a non-racial qualified franchise system based on property ownership and income, allowing African men who met the threshold to vote and participate in local governance. This system, however imperfect, had allowed a small but significant Black middle class, specifically mission-educated leaders and tenant farmers to access formal

political rights. While the Cape franchise technically persisted for a while, the 1913 law increasingly hindered Africans from meeting the land ownership and income requirements, especially as tenant agreements and cash cropping were criminalized. Maano also adds by stating that, they were also forced to have title deeds which indicates that any transfer of grant required the government's concern.[94] This restriction was a deliberate political disenfranchisement strategy. White lawmakers understood that controlling land meant controlling access to political rights. The object was clear: the exclusion of the African from the political community without openly saying so.

The Native Land Act enforced a more extensive bureaucratic control over African lives. Within its framework, Africans were governed by land boards, magistrates, and the Native Affairs Department, all operated by white officials. These bodies decided residency on white-owned farms, who could stay in reserves, and if Africans could relocate or lease land. Essentially, state officials assumed powers once held by African communities, especially chiefs and councils, stripping them of genuine governance. Simultaneously, the Act maintained the geographic and political status quo, relegating Africans to tenants, laborers, and subjects rather than citizens. Chiefs in rural areas became state policy agents, rewarded or punished for compliance. In urban areas, black South Africans were considered temporary residents "citizens" of reserves without rights to urban land or political participation. This shift institutionalised the belief that Black individuals were not part of the political nation, despite being the majority. Consequently, a dual state emerged one with rights and elections for whites, and another with authoritarian rule for Africans.

African land rights were eroded by the Act of 1913, marking the end of the Cape liberal tradition that once supported a racially inclusive franchise based on "civilisation" and property. By the 1920s and 1930s, this ideal was fully abandoned. Black people were excluded from the Cape's common voters' roll, resulting in separate and powerless electoral bodies. This development was a direct continuation of the Act's logic, without land ownership, Africans couldn't vote, and without the vote, they couldn't contest land dispossession. The

[94] M. Ramatsindela, "The Enduring Spatial Legacy of the Native Land Act," *Journal Name* 39, no. 2 (2013): 292.

loss of land and franchise also brought about a deeper form of political alienation. Black people were not just excluded from voting, they were excluded from the imagination of the nation itself. By denying black people the right to land, voice and legal recognition, the state claimed exclusive legitimacy. Africans were cast as outsiders, governed by decree rather than consent. This system, rooted in the Act of 1913, created the structural conditions for authoritarian rule that would last until the end of apartheid. These policies paved the way for apartheid. The GAA (1950), BAA Act (1951), and the formation of the Bantustans (1950s–1980s) all followed the 1913 Act's lead in using territorial segregation for political disenfranchisement.

5.3. Expansion of Informal Settlements and Racially Segregated Townships

The Act of 1913 indirectly impacted urban Africans, leading to significant spatial changes in South African towns and cities. As rural black South Africans moved into urban areas seeking employment, a lack of secure land rights and formal housing options led to informal settlements and racially segregated townships. According to Harrison, “informal settlements’ are shanty towns that typically emerge without formal oversight (shelters created outside formal housing delivery mechanism), housing a growing share of the urban population. He also defines "squatting" as occupying land without the owner's consent.[95] These developments were deliberate results of land ownership and urban exclusions, first enacted by the Land Act and later reinforced by apartheid laws, creating a divided urban environment. Black individuals were pushed to the city margins with limited access to infrastructure and economic opportunities. Phala states that the loss of land among Africans led to unstoppable urbanization. They transitioned from being migrants to dwellers, envying urban areas. By the 1920s-1930s, many black South Africans rejected the state's view of them as rural or temporary workers. Despite restrictions from the Native Land Act and pass laws, urbanisation grew as people sought better lives in cities. Black families could only live-in cities if a member was employed, leading to precarious living conditions in "native locations," poorly serviced districts on city outskirts. Rising urban populations outpaced the state's control efforts. Lacking formal market access, many built unauthorized shacks and informal settlements.

[95] P. Harrison, “The Policies and Politics of Informal Settlements in South Africa: A Historical Perspective,” *Journal Name* 22, no. 1 (1992): 14.

The rural economy's decline triggered a massive migration to cities. In Johannesburg, the number of migrants surged from 244,000 in 1939 to 400,000 in 1946, driven by wartime disruptions. Similarly, in Pretoria, illegal squatter villages emerged by 1948. In Durban, the squatter population in Cato Manor exploded from 17,000 in 1943 to 50,000 by 1950.[96] In response to growing urban black populations, the state created townships as a form of controlled exclusion. Townships like Sophiatown (Johannesburg), Langa and District 6 (Cape Town), Orlando (Soweto), and Alexandra (Johannesburg) aimed to maintain spatial separation from white suburbs, offering minimal infrastructure. Alexandra Township, a privately established area near Johannesburg, attracted Black migrants banned from white areas. Despite proximity to affluent Sandton, Alexandra remained underdeveloped, without key services for decades.[97] Throughout apartheid, the government pressured Alexandra's residents to relocate, but the community resisted. Alexandra's survival as a densely populated, under-resourced area highlights the shortcomings of apartheid's spatial control and the persistence of urban black communities. These townships, usually on urban edges, required long commutes and limited access to essential services. Housing was small, crowded, and uniform, with residency linked to employment and constant threat of removal.[98]

By the mid-20th century, township development struggled to meet increasing demand due to swift urbanisation. Consequently, informal settlements known as imijondolo, shanty towns, or squatter camps emerged around cities.[99] These areas were mostly unregulated, missing formal housing and services, and often faced demolitions by the authorities. By the 1980s, informal settlements had become prominent in South Africa, notably in places like Cape Town's Crossroads, Durban's Inanda, and Pretoria's Mamelodi. These settlements were not only zones of poverty but also manifestations of a legal and political system originating in 1913. This system denied black people land rights, excluded them from formal housing, and treated them as temporary residents in their own land.

[96] Ibid.
[97] J. Van Wyk, "The Legacy of the 1913 Black Land Act for Spatial Planning," 101.
[98] M. Wilson, *Alexandra Township and the Alexsan Kopano Research Centre: Background Report for UNESCO* (Johannesburg: LINK Centre, University of the Witwatersrand), 6.
[99] S. A. Rao and N. Geffen, "Housing in South Africa: How Have We Done Since 1994?" *GroundUp*, October 31, 2023, https://groundup.org.za/article/housing-in-south-africa-how-have-we-done-since-1994/ (accessed June 18, 2025).

Even after the 1994 shift to democracy, the urban spatial consequences of the Land Act endure. Many townships continue to be sidelined, marked by severe poverty, overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and scarce economic opportunities. Locations like Khayelitsha, District 6 (Cape Town), Diepsloot (Johannesburg), Duncan Village (East London), and Alexandra (Johannesburg) still accommodate millions in conditions reminiscent of colonial and apartheid planning. A glaring sign of spatial injustices is the lengthy commuting times in post-apartheid cities as black working-class individuals often travel long hours to reach jobs in urban centres, a result of urban sprawl and mismatched spatial planning. These extended travel times, high transport expenses, and broken infrastructure stem from deliberate planning initiated by the Land Act's segregation policies and continued under apartheid. Informal settlements keep growing, symbolising not just modern shortcomings but also the historical repercussions of land dispossession handed down through generations. The enduring spread of informal settlements and segregated townships is a lasting spatial by product of the 1913 Act, which entrenched a pattern of spatial exclusion and defined urban belonging. Townships like Alexandra, originally intended as labour reserves, were rooted in separation and control, while informal settlements are born out of resistance and exclusion. The present urban inequalities, spanning housing shortages and township neglect, trace back to this 1913 spatial framework. Genuine efforts to tackle South Africa’s urban issues must confront this historical legacy directly, recognizing the legally embedded geography of injustice over a century ago.

While legal apartheid ended, the spatial and urban inequalities from decades of dispossession persist. South African cities still mirror the effects of forced relocations, racial divisions, and the migrant labour system, resulting in poverty, limited opportunities, and ongoing battles over land and housing. Urban areas reflect spatial apartheid, with black townships and informal settlements mainly located on the outskirts, away from economic centres, quality education, healthcare and infrastructure. For example, Alexandra Township's residents experience significant inequalities despite being near the wealthy Sandton area, highlighting that physical proximity doesn't equate to social or economic integration. Research indicates township residents often face over two-hour daily commutes, creating

economic and social challenges.[100] This disconnect between homes and job locations directly stems from the Native Land Act and was further enforced by apartheid-era zoning and urban planning.

Despite extensive government housing efforts since 1994, approximately 5.2 million subsidised units built the demand for adequate shelter has consistently outpaced supply.[101] The government's 2024 White Paper on Human Settlements records more than 3.4 million households on the housing demand database and between 3,200 and 3,400 informal settlements nationwide, underscoring a structural backlog concentrated on the urban periphery.[102] Three forces perpetuate this crisis: rapid urbanisation into metros without sufficient well-located serviced land; high land and service costs in cities that push projects to cheaper but peripheral locations; and the persistence of historic spatial exclusion, which continues to channel low-income households into informal tenure arrangements while they wait for formal opportunities. The White Paper concedes that informal settlement growth continues despite large-scale delivery, and that many remain severely under-serviced. In Khayelitsha (Cape Town), for instance, Census 2022 data show that while formal service coverage has expanded metro-wide, informal sections such as BM Section remain overcrowded and under-serviced. Social audits documented families sharing far fewer working toilets than contracted, with poor maintenance prompting a City-funded janitorial programme whose performance has been uneven.[103] The City of Johannesburg's website notes that Diepsloot is characterized by high population density and poverty, with an estimated 11,500 people per square kilometre in 2011, and significant growth reported since then. The area faces recurring service delivery protests due to strain on basic services. These conditions are symptoms of a spatial system that historically denies black South Africans secure tenure and urban land access, rooted in the dispossessive legacy of the Act of 1913.

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[100] M. Wilson, *Alexandra Township and the Alexsan Kopano Research Centre: Background Report for UNESCO* (Johannesburg: LINK Centre, University of the Witwatersrand), 6.
[101] S. A. Rao and N. Geffen, "Housing in South Africa: How Have We Done Since 1994?" *GroundUp*, October 31, 2023, https://groundup.org.za/article/housing-in-south-africa-how-have-we-done-since-1994/ (accessed June 18, 2025).
[102] Department of Human Settlements, *White Paper on Human Settlements* (Pretoria: Government of South Africa, 2024), 32–33, https://www.dhs.gov.za/sites/default/files/documents/APPROVED%20WHITE%20PAPER%20FOR%20PUBLICATION%20DEC%202024.pdf
[103] Social Justice Coalition, *Social Audit Report on Sanitation in Khayelitsha* (Cape Town, 2013), 14, https://internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/Social-Justice-Coalition-Report-of-the-Khayelitsha-Mshengu-Toilet-Social-Audit.pdf (accessed June 17, 2025).

The legacy of the Act complicates urban land reform efforts. Unlike the more debated rural land reform, urban land redistribution is complex and politically sensitive. Urban land is limited, costly, and largely privately owned, leaving Black people with limited market access. Policy has increasingly shifted toward in-situ upgrading, serviced sites, and rental or social housing as alternatives to the traditional RDP house, aiming to stretch budgets and bring homes closer to employment hubs. Yet the White Paper acknowledges capacity and fiscal constraints: thousands of informal settlements remain under-serviced, and households frequently remain in limbo with partial services and insecure tenure. Activist groups like Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Social Justice Coalition fight for land rights and the legitimisation of informal settlements as urban communities.[104] Their activism underscores the ongoing fight for spatial justice within South Africa's larger quest for equality and democracy. Spatial inequality drastically impacts psychological and social realms. Living in marginalised urban areas often restricts social mobility, breeds stigma, and alienates individuals from mainstream urban life. Such spatial marginalisation perpetuates disempowerment, resonating with the psychological tolls of dispossession.

Contemporary South African cities continue to face spatial and urban inequalities linked to the Act of 1913. The shift in politics post-apartheid has not erased the exclusion manifested through extensive, ill-serviced townships, ongoing informal settlements, and limited economic and social access for Black people. Overcoming these issues requires more than minor policy changes; it needs a dedicated approach to spatial justice, urban land reform, and dismantling exclusionary spatial structures.

The legacy of the1913 has left an ineradicable mark on indigenous communities. The whole communities were uprooted from their ancestral lands and moved to overcrowded reserves with limited resources which resulted to disrupting traditional livelihoods, cultural ties, and social cohesion of black individuals. The enduring effects of these forced removals are still evident today, as many communities continue to struggle with the loss of their land and the intergenerational trauma resulting from displacement. With the limitation and access to productive agricultural land has hindered opportunities that black South Africans were given, they were denied the ability to build sustainable livelihoods for themselves, which perpetuated in cycles of poverty and economic inequality. Moreover, the loss of land as a

[104] Abahlali baseMjondolo, Movement Website, https://abahlali.org (accessed July 27, 2025).

source of identity and cultural heritage has had intangible effects on the well-being and self-determination of affected communities. In spite of the democratic reforms and ongoing land restitution initiatives, the impact of the Act of 1913 still lingers in contemporary South Africa. Land reform efforts face many challenges, including limited resources, bureaucratic obstacles, and competing interests. The discussion regulating around land reform continues to be contentious because it is not only addressing historical injustices but also the delicate balance between restorative justice and economic stability. The legacy of the Act of 1913 highlights the deep-rooted inequalities and historical injustices faced by black South Africans. In addressing these imbalances, a comprehensive approach needs to be taken into account of the historical context, socio-economic realities, and community aspirations. Meaningful land reform that promotes restorative justice, economic empowerment, and sustainable development is vital for the future of South Africa, fostering a more equitable society where all citizens can participate fully and benefit from the country's resources. By so doing, the Act of 1913 has had a lasting impact on landownership and access black people.

The following differentiated account – particularly of how land, labour and urbanisation operated differently in the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State is critical as it would sharpen the argument and account for divergent historical trajectories.

5.4. Provincial Variations in the Impact of the 1913 Native Land Act

5.4.1 Cape Province: Liberal Land Tenure and Urban Labour Dynamics

In the Cape Province, the effects of the 1913 Native Land Act were mediated by the region’s relatively liberal land tenure system and historical Cape franchise. Rural areas, particularly along the Ciskei and Transkei borderlands, illustrate how African peasantries experienced dispossession differently from other provinces. African farmers here were active participants in regional markets, yet the Act constrained their landholdings, limited expansion, and disrupted local economies. Urban centres such as Cape Town, including peri-urban townships like Langa and the pre-Group Areas District Six, reveal the interaction between land dispossession and urban labour migration. Africans increasingly relied on wage labour in the city while maintaining ties to rural plots, demonstrating a complex interplay between rural land loss and urban

economic dependence. This duality highlights a distinctive Cape trajectory, where liberal-era institutions moderated but did not prevent the Act's racialised outcomes.

5.4.2 Natal: Plantation Economies and Coerced Labour

Natal presents a contrasting dynamic, shaped by its sugar plantation economy and distinct demographic composition. Rural districts such as Umzinto and Tongaat experienced African displacement in ways closely tied to plantation labour demands. The Act reinforced white settler control over fertile land while facilitating access to cheap African labour, particularly through coercive tenancy arrangements and migration systems. In peri-urban areas around Pietermaritzburg, African communities navigated evolving patterns of tenancy, urban migration, and labour recruitment, highlighting the differential impact of the Act on African livelihoods compared to the Cape. Natal's case underscores how economic structures—specifically plantation agriculture—shaped dispossession and labour exploitation in ways distinct from provinces with more diversified rural economies.

5.4.3 Transvaal: Mining, Reserves, and Urbanisation

In the Transvaal, the 1913 Native Land Act intersected with the demands of the mining economy and urban growth. African communities in rural areas surrounding the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging corridor faced dispossession of smallholdings and limitations on land tenure, which reinforced dependence on wage labour in nearby mining towns. The Witwatersrand goldfields exemplify how reserves were maintained as labour reservoirs, supplying cheap migrant workers to urban industries while limiting independent rural production. The combination of mining capitalism and restrictive land policies produced patterns of urbanisation that were tightly linked to labour control, illustrating a provincial experience markedly different from the agrarian-focused Cape and Natal.

5.4.4. Orange Free State: Settler Agriculture and Labour Constraints

The Orange Free State (OFS) demonstrates yet another variant of the Act's impact. Dominated by white settler farmers, rural districts such as Bethlehem and Bloemfontein's hinterlands saw African tenant farmers and pastoralists dispossessed with little room for negotiation. Urban centres in the OFS, including peri-urban Bloemfontein, experienced early forms of African urbanisation shaped by labour

recruitment to local markets and administrative centres. Unlike Natal's plantation-focused or the Transvaal's mining-driven economies, the OFS highlights how settler agrarian dominance and limited African landholdings created a sharply constrained landscape for African economic and social life.

5.4.5. Comparative Insights

Taken together, these provincial case studies illustrate the uneven and differentiated impacts of the Native Land Act. While the Act uniformly enforced racialised land restrictions, the nature of dispossession, labour patterns, and urbanisation varied according to local economic structures, demographic pressures, and political cultures. In the Cape, liberal land policies and urban wage economies moderated but did not eliminate dispossession; in Natal, plantation agriculture and coerced labour intensified African dependency; in the Transvaal, mining capitalism and reserves structured both rural and urban labour; and in the OFS, settler agrarian dominance sharply limited African access to land. Recognising these provincial distinctions strengthens the dissertation's analysis of the multi-scalar and uneven nature of racial capitalism, demonstrating that African experiences of land loss, labour exploitation, and urban marginality were not uniform but shaped by local contexts.

CHAPTER SIX

African Voices of Resistance: From the 1913 Natives Land Act to Post-Apartheid Struggles for Land Restitution and Reform

6.1. Introduction

The struggle over land in South Africa has always been more than a contest over geography or material resources. It has been a struggle over belonging, dignity, sovereignty, and the fundamental terms of freedom. From the earliest years of colonial encroachment, African communities understood land as the foundation of social order and economic independence. The 1913 Natives Land Act marked one of the most violent and far-reaching ruptures in this historical fabric. By confining Africans to a mere 7 percent of the land—later expanded slightly to 13 percent—while barring them from purchasing or leasing land outside these restricted reserves, the Act formalised a racialised geography that rendered millions landless, immiserated, and forced into exploitative labour regimes. The Act also produced an outpouring of African voices documenting the suffering it unleashed and asserting the right of African people to land as the basis of freedom and self-determination.

Yet land dispossession did not end with the Act, nor was the resistance it provoked confined to the early twentieth century. Rather, the grievances articulated by Africans in the wake of 1913 have reverberated through successive generations of political struggle, from the African National Congress's early petitions to the mid-century rural revolts, the land-centred rhetoric of the liberation movements, and the intensifying frustrations of the post-apartheid era. Despite formal democratic transition in 1994, large-scale dispossession has persisted in subtler forms, as land reform and restitution have advanced unevenly, slowly, and often ineffectively. In response, movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Landless People's Movement have revived and transformed the historical tradition of popular land resistance, foregrounding the voices of the poor in contesting ongoing dispossession and the failures of the democratic state to deliver substantive land justice.

This chapter argues that African resistance to the 1913 Natives Land Act and the contemporary mobilisation against the slow and uneven progress of post-apartheid land restitution—epitomised by movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Landless People's Movement, and other grassroots formations—constitute an unbroken historical continuum through which African voices expose the enduring legacies of colonial

dispossession, contest the state's failure to deliver substantive land justice, and reassert land as the indispensable foundation of a truly completed liberation project.

6.2. Early African Voices of Resistance to the 1913 Natives Land Act

The enactment of the 1913 Natives Land Act constituted a decisive rupture in South Africa's land relations, producing one of the earliest and most substantial archives of African political testimony in the twentieth century. Among these voices, Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* (1916) remains foundational, offering a meticulous account of dispossession and its human consequences. Travelling extensively in the months following the Act's implementation, Plaatje recorded the testimonies of evicted tenants, sharecroppers, widows, and rural communities whose livelihoods were extinguished virtually overnight. He documented not only material suffering but also the profound sense of betrayal engendered by a state that had legislated Black poverty and dislocation. One tenant farmer recalled, "We have lived here since my father's father. We have planted, we have paid our rent, and we have buried our dead on this land. But now we are told we must leave because the law says a native may not live on this farm."[105] Such narratives foreground African claims to land that predate colonial legal frameworks, asserting that African belonging to land is both historically and morally prior to the imposed property regimes.

Beyond individual testimonies, African political and traditional authorities mobilised to contest dispossession. The Tswana chiefs' declarations from the 1910s and 1920s exemplify this resistance: Kgosi Sebopiwa of the Hurutshe lamented that the law "treats us like children without a home," asserting that Africans "were born with the land; we did not come to it as strangers."[106] Here, land is conceptualised not only as ancestral inheritance but also as a marker of political existence, embodying claims to sovereignty and identity. Archival letters preserved by missionary institutions such as Lovedale and Fort Hare document similar perspectives. African teachers, clerks, and farmers wrote in 1915 that the Act "compels us to go backward, not forward," highlighting the destruction of independent agriculture and the curtailment of Africans' capacity for economic autonomy.[107] Together, these voices converge in critiquing the Act as a tool of dehumanisation, labour coercion, and political

[105] Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1916), 97.
[106] Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, *Abahlali baseMjondolo: Living Politics* (Durban, 2022), 14.
[107] Ibid., 15.

exclusion, emphasising that the struggle against dispossession was also a struggle for the restoration of African dignity and autonomy. Plaatje's methodological emphasis on foregrounding African voices—through interviews, letters, and petitions—prefigures the testimonial strategies of contemporary movements such as the Landless People's Movement and Abahlali baseMjondolo, where documentation and moral argumentation remain central. These early testimonies also reveal a keen awareness of the generational dimensions of dispossession. Tenants and farmers repeatedly stressed that losing land meant severing the transmission of security, identity, and prosperity to children: "If my children cannot inherit this soil, what future is there for them?"[108] This concern over intergenerational loss resonates profoundly with the contemporary rhetoric of Abahlali baseMjondolo, whose members describe landlessness as both a material crisis and a spiritual wound inherited across generations.

African responses to the 1913 Act were multifaceted. Some engaged in formal petitions and deputations to the British Crown, while others pursued everyday forms of resistance, including refusal to vacate farms, informal sharecropping, or surreptitious cultivation on marginal lands. These acts, though often unpublicised, represented sustained challenges to the legitimacy of colonial property regimes. The South African Native National Congress, the precursor to the African National Congress, mobilised immediately against the Act, sending a deputation to London in 1914 to petition the British Crown for redress. The petition characterised the legislation as "a sentence of slavery," emphasising that dispossession would force Africans into wage labour under coercive conditions and destroy long-standing community structures. Such appeals illustrate the early internationalisation of African land struggles, a strategy mirrored in contemporary advocacy where movements like Abahlali baseMjondolo invoke global human rights frameworks to contest evictions and state violence.

Across this continuum, a series of thematic consistencies emerges.[109] Land is consistently framed as foundational to human dignity, freedom and belonging, from Plaatje's observation that Africans had been "turned into wanderers on the face of their own country" to S'bu Zikode's assertion in 2018 that "land is life. Without land we cannot be safe, we cannot be

[108] Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa*, 103.
[109] Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa*, 116.

free, and we cannot be human."[110] Both eras reveal dispossession as a structural and state-driven phenomenon, whether through colonial legislation or post-apartheid municipal evictions and bureaucratic capture of land reform. The human costs remain strikingly similar: the destruction of homes, livelihoods, and social networks; the intergenerational trauma of landlessness; and the persistent struggle to assert moral and political claims to the land. Contemporary Abahlali baseMjondolo documents repeated instances of police brutality, illegal evictions, and political assassinations, asserting that "when we speak of land we speak of life, and for this we are killed," echoing the historical repression faced during rural revolts and early twentieth-century dispossessions.[111] In linking the archival testimony of 1913 to contemporary grassroots activism, it becomes evident that South Africa's land struggles constitute a single, evolving archive of resistance. Movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo do not emerge in a vacuum; rather, they inhabit a historical trajectory extending over a century, standing as custodians of a moral and political struggle against exclusion, spatial marginalisation, and state-sanctioned violence. The persistence of these struggles underscores that the quest for land in South Africa is inseparable from broader demands for dignity, belonging, and democratic accountability.

The struggle over land in South Africa exhibits remarkable historical continuity, spanning early twentieth-century dispossession through mid-century rural resistance and into contemporary urban activism. Although apartheid-era legislation such as the Group Areas Act and the Bantu Authorities Act entrenched dispossession, resistance simultaneously intensified, adapting to the new legal and political frameworks imposed by the state. Rural revolts of the 1940s and 1950s — in Sekhukhuneland, Zeerust and Pondoland — illustrate how land remained central to African grievances. In Sekhukhuneland in 1958, women led opposition to the imposition of Bantu Authorities, asserting before the Tomlinson Commission that "land cannot be ruled by those who do not belong to it."[112] Similarly, the Pondoland revolt (1960–1962) centred on disputes over land, taxation, and chiefly authority, with oral testimonies detailing how forced incorporation into Bantu Authorities threatened ancestral land rights and subjected communities to intensified state extraction. These instances

[110] S'bu Zikode, Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement, 2018.
[111] Abahlali baseMjondolo Memorial Address, June 2023.
[112] Tomlinson Commission Report, 1958.

demonstrate that African resistance was neither intermittent nor reactive; it continuously evolved to contest successive forms of legal, spatial, and economic marginalisation.

This mid-century activism fed directly into the broader liberation movements. The Freedom Charter of 1955 declared that "the land shall be shared among those who work it," echoing the moral and political assertions of early twentieth-century actors such as Solomon Plaatje and the rural testimonies he recorded.[113] The Pan-Africanist Congress articulated an even sharper stance with its slogan "Africa for Africans," linking the question of land explicitly to sovereignty and political self-determination.[114] These pronouncements reveal that the contestation over land in South Africa has always encompassed both material and symbolic dimensions: land is not merely a resource but a marker of identity, dignity, and belonging.
The advent of democracy in 1994 raised expectations of substantive redress through restitution, redistribution, and tenure reform. Yet, three decades later, land reform remains slow, uneven, and politically contested. By 2024, less than ten percent of commercial farmland had been redistributed, far short of the government's 30 percent target, while restitution cases frequently delivered monetary compensation rather than actual land.[115] Bureaucratic capture of land reform processes, persistent urban evictions, and the failure to provide serviced land perpetuate longstanding patterns of exclusion, leaving many African communities disillusioned with the democratic state. These structural continuities reflect the enduring imprint of the 1913 Natives Land Act, whose spatial and economic logics continue to shape access to land and the organisation of African life.

It is within this context that post-apartheid movements such as the Landless People's Movement (founded in 2001) and Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM, founded in 2005) have emerged. AbM, in particular, has become the most significant grassroots formation advocating for urban land rights, secure tenure, and recognition of human dignity. Framing itself as a movement of people "who have no land, no houses and no voice,"[116] AbM situates land as a moral and political right rather than merely a commodity. In 2018, its president S'bu Zikode declared, "Land is life. Without land we cannot be safe, we cannot be free, and we cannot be human,"[117] a formulation that echoes early twentieth-century critiques of

[113] Oral histories collected from Mpondo elders, 1960–1962.
[114] Pan-Africanist Congress, *Manifesto*, 1959.
[115] Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, *Abahlali baseMjondolo: Living Politics*, September 2022.
[116] Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement, 2022.
[117] S'bu Zikode, Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement, 2018.

dispossession linking landlessness directly to dehumanisation. For AbM, the post-apartheid state's failure to secure land for the poor constitutes a continuation of historical oppression, perpetuating the material and symbolic marginalisation that has defined African life under successive regimes.

Central to AbM's activism is the articulation of the "right to the city," which foregrounds the systematic exclusion of the poor from well-located urban areas. In a 2022 press statement, the movement observed, "Our democracy is divided between those who have a place in the cities and those who are condemned to the edges."[118] This critique resonates with earlier grievances arising from the 1913 Act, which confined Africans to reserves and marginal spaces, and with mid-twentieth-century spatial marginalisation under apartheid. AbM's insistence on urban land as a site of citizenship and belonging underscores the continuity of African claims to land as both a material and moral imperative. The movement also documents the persistent violence experienced by communities defending land, recording repeated police brutality, illegal evictions, and targeted assassinations. In a June 2023 memorial address for Ayanda Ngila, a slain activist, AbM declared, "When we speak of land we speak of life, and for this we are killed."[119] This statement situates contemporary struggles within a broader historical continuum, linking post-apartheid repression to the brutal measures faced by rural populations during mid-twentieth-century revolts, such as those in Pondoland.

Moreover, AbM challenges dominant narratives that frame urban shack settlements as problems of rural-urban migration, criminality, or individual irresponsibility. Instead, the movement emphasises that shack dwellers occupy informal settlements because the state has systematically failed to provide land, housing, and basic services, leaving residents in "life-threatening conditions without water, sanitation, road access, waste collection, and electricity" and subjecting them to "sustained political repression, including assault, arrest, torture, imprisonment, murder, and the criminalisation of protests."[120] This experience reflects the structural legacies of the 1913 Act, demonstrating that poor Black residents remain framed as "illegal" or "criminal" when asserting claims to survival, mirroring the discourses used to justify dispossession in both colonial and apartheid contexts. Across

[118] Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Statement, 2022.
[119] Abahlali baseMjondolo Memorial Address, June 2023.
[120] Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, *Abahlali baseMjondolo: Living Politics*, 2022, 18–20

these historical moments, from the rural revolts of the mid-twentieth century to contemporary urban struggles, African resistance to land dispossession emerges as a continuous and adaptive force. Movements like Abahlali baseMjondolo inherit a century-long archive of moral, political, and spatial claims, insisting on the inseparability of land, dignity, and human freedom. Far from being a novel phenomenon, contemporary activism represents the ongoing articulation of a deeply rooted African political tradition: one that confronts structural exclusion, documents injustice, and demands recognition of both human and territorial rights.

6.3 Case Study 1: The Origins and Political Philosophy of Abahlali baseMjondolo

Founded in 2005, Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) has grown into a movement of over 180,000 shack dwellers advocating for urban land rights, secure tenure and human dignity. Its political philosophy is rooted in a radical democratic ethos that prioritises the voices of the poor, insisting on "building power from below."[121] The movement challenges the paternalism of state-led development by asserting that shack dwellers themselves possess the moral authority and political intelligence to determine their own futures — a stance echoing early African deputations against the 1913 Natives Land Act, which insisted that Africans were active political agents capable of articulating their own needs.[122] AbM articulates land as the basis of dignity: the struggle is not merely for housing, but for the restoration of humanity denied through centuries of dispossession. The movement declares: "We fight for land and against the relentless vandalisation of our dignity… We demand land, housing, dignity, justice, and food sovereignty for all."[123] This framing resonates strongly with the testimonies Plaatje collected in 1913, where land was tied to autonomy, family continuity, and moral status.

The movement's strategy of reclaiming land through occupation parallels earlier African forms of resistance to forced removals. AbM explains that it occupies land "to create places for people to live and build communities," emphasising that this practice is grounded in a moral claim to the cities that the poor helped build.[124] Zikode notes, "No human being in their right senses would, out of their own will, choose to live in a shack… Shack life is precarious

[121] Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, *Abahlali baseMjondolo: Living Politics*, September 2022
[122] Solomon T. Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa* (London: P. S. King, 1916), especially chapters 1–3 on African deputations and political agency.
[123] Abahlali baseMjondolo, "We Fight for Land and Dignity," movement statement, 2024.
[124] Abahlali baseMjondolo, "We Fight for Land and Dignity," movement statement, 2024

and does not allow one to build a home for one's family."[125] AbM's efforts to develop "vibrant communes" producing food and social infrastructure reflect a political and economic vision rooted in pre-colonial communal landholding principles fractured by the 1913 Land Act.

6.4. Case Study 2: Legal Victories and the Assertion of Human Dignity

AbM has successfully used the courts to secure both practical and symbolic recognition of the poor's rights. In 2025, a High Court ruling required the KwaDukuza Municipality to provide basic services, demarcated stands and dignified relocation conditions before evictions could proceed.[126] The court acknowledged the humanity of shack dwellers and rejected municipal attempts to treat them as "trash." For AbM, the ruling was both a legal and moral victory: "This judgement is a landmark as it will ensure that the rich do not treat the poor like trash… It recognises that human beings must be treated with dignity."[127] These victories echo early African appeals to the British Crown in 1913–14, reflecting continuity in the struggle for recognition, dignity, and land rights even as the legal terrain has shifted from colonial to constitutional frameworks. AbM's legal activism extends beyond land to resisting xenophobic violence. In October 2025, the movement won a High Court ruling declaring Operation Dudula, a xenophobic vigilante organisation, "unlawful, unconstitutional and xenophobic."[128] AbM described Dudula as a "militarised fascist organisation" scapegoating migrants for structural inequalities, reflecting a political ethic of African solidarity.[129] This stance echoes early African leaders who rejected colonial attempts to divide communities, highlighting the moral consistency of African resistance across a century.[130]

6.5. Case Study 3: KwaDukuza Evictions and the Persistence of Spatial Exclusion

The 2025 evictions on the Dolphin Coast illustrate the continuation of spatial logics established under colonialism and apartheid. AbM condemned the KwaDukuza Municipality for forcibly removing shack dwellers from valuable urban land: "The same state that promised us land and housing now sends men with guns to destroy our homes."[131] The racialized spatial politics—where poor Black residents are permitted to labour in affluent areas but not

[125] S'bu Zikode, "The Politics of the Poor," public address, Abahlali baseMjondolo, 2017.
[126] Abahlali baseMjondolo, "A Landmark Judgment for the Poor," press statement, 15 May 2025.
[127] Ibid.
[128] *Operation Dudula Judgment*, High Court of South Africa (Gauteng Division), Judgment of 3 October 2025.
[129] Abahlali baseMjondolo, "Abahlali Welcomes Court Ruling Against Dudula," statement, 4 October 2025.
[130] Correspondence of Sotho-Tswana leaders to British colonial officials, 1913, cited in Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa*, 67–72.
[131] Abahlali baseMjondolo, "KwaDukuza Municipality Is Waging War on the Poor," media statement, November 2025.

live there—reflect the exclusionary practices of the Group Areas Act and the 1913 Land Act.[132] AbM also critiques the post-apartheid state for perpetuating injustice: “A black government is being used to perpetuate these injustices,” evoking historical disillusionment similar to early African responses to colonial dispossession.[133]

6.6. Case Study 4: Mqapheli Bonono and the Globalisation of African Land Struggles

AbM’s Deputy President Mqapheli Bonono situates contemporary struggles within a global frame. In 2025, speaking at the World Meeting of Popular Movements in Rome, Bonono reflected on the “pain of Abahlali” and the global dimensions of land and dignity struggles.[134] 30 He described surviving assassination attempts and imprisonment, highlighting the violence facing contemporary land activists—reminiscent of colonial and apartheid repression. Bonono asked, “How can you find peace when justice is not being served, especially for people who have been pushed away from having a place on the earth?”[135] This echoes the concerns of African farmers in 1913, who feared the loss of generational land security. He also affirmed that “housing, work, and land are sacred rights,” framing land as moral inheritance rather than commodity.” [136] Bonono further argued: “The struggle for land is a struggle for equality in the world. We are denied land because those in power fear a people who can stand on their own.”[137] This global articulation parallels Plaatje’s 1914 petition to London, demonstrating the continuity of strategies that seek international recognition for injustices rooted in dispossession.

In conclusion, the testimonies produced in the wake of the 1913 Natives Land Act and the contemporary statements of movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo form a single, continuous archive of African resistance to land dispossession, even though they arise from different historical moments. Read together, they illuminate a shared language through which African communities articulate land as the grounding of life, dignity, and political belonging. When Solomon Plaatje wrote that Africans awoke “to find themselves, not actually slaves, but pariahs in the land of their birth,” he captured a sentiment that echoes unmistakably in

[132] Christopher J. Lee, *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), discussion of apartheid spatial ordering and its antecedents.
[133] Abahlali baseMjondolo, “A Black Government Perpetuating Apartheid Spatial Injustice,” statement, November 2025.
[134] Mqapheli Bonono, “Address to the World Meeting of Popular Movements,” Rome, February 2025.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Mnikelo Ndabankulu Bonono, “The Struggle for Land Is a Global Struggle,” Rome intervention, 2024.

S’bu Zikode’s assertion more than a century later that “land is life” and that without secure land tenure the poor cannot experience freedom in any substantive sense.[138] Across time, African voices insist that land is not merely an economic resource but the material and spiritual basis of human dignity, identity, and citizenship.

What ties the two eras together most profoundly is the recognition that dispossession is not accidental but structural — imposed, maintained, and reproduced by the state. In 1913 dispossession was codified in law through the Natives Land Act, which restricted African land ownership to a fraction of the country and criminalised African tenancy in “white” areas. In the post-apartheid period, although the legal architecture has changed, dispossession persists through evictions carried out by municipal authorities, police units, and private development interests. The state continues to enforce spatial exclusion, now justified through the language of urban planning, environmental compliance, or infrastructural improvement. Contemporary movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo document these practices in their press statements, describing how police destroy homes before dawn, how court orders are ignored, and how settlements are cleared to make way for elite development. These experiences resonate with Plaatje’s descriptions of families expelled from farms, forced to wander in search of land, their homes burnt or seized under the authority of the Act.

Despite the shifting legal and political terrain, the human cost of dispossession remains strikingly consistent. Both eras foreground the suffering of families and communities: homes demolished, graves desecrated, livestock lost, and social networks shattered. Plaatje chronicled the trauma of families who were uprooted with little notice, their means of survival instantly destroyed. Contemporary testimonies similarly describe the devastation wrought by forced removals — the scattering of communities, the loss of belongings, the psychological strain of instability, and the erosion of social bonds that sustain everyday life. In both periods, dispossession is experienced not only as material loss but as an assault on the intricate social worlds through which African communities sustain themselves. Yet neither era is defined solely by suffering. Both are characterised by a vibrant tradition of resistance grounded in organisation, documentation, and moral argument. Africans in 1913 responded

[138] Nicholas Mwangi, Land as a source of life: a continental reckoning with dispossession and struggle. Accessed 30 June 2025. https://peoplesdispatch.org/2025/06/30/land-as-a-source-of-life-a-continental-reckoning-with-dispossession-and-struggle/

with petitions, letters, and deputations that challenged the legitimacy of the Act and asserted their rights as human beings and subjects of the Crown. These petitions—meticulously recorded and disseminated—were designed to appeal to a sense of justice believed to exist beyond the South African state. Contemporary movements likewise use written statements, affidavits, and public declarations to expose abuses and articulate a moral critique of a state that claims democratic legitimacy while reproducing injustices reminiscent of colonial rule. Abahlali baseMjondolo, for example, consistently frames its struggle as a demand to recognise the full humanity of the poor, insisting that dignity is non-negotiable and that land is essential to realising it. The language of justice, accountability, and collective humanity animates both eras, revealing a shared tradition of political argumentation rooted in ethical claims rather than merely technical demands.

Another striking continuity is the strategic appeal to international audiences. In 1914 African leaders travelled to London to petition the British government, believing that the metropole might correct the abuses of the settler state. Their mission may not have achieved immediate legislative change, but it articulated the international dimensions of the land question and situated African grievances within a global forum. More than a century later, contemporary activists continue this tradition. When Lindokuhle Mnguni, and later Mqapheli George Bonono, addressed audiences in Rome, they framed the South African land crisis as part of a broader global pattern of inequality and exclusion. Such speeches extend the struggle beyond national boundaries and signal that the pursuit of land justice is part of a wider fight against global systems that marginalise the poor. The land question, therefore, has never been a matter confined to domestic politics; it has always been an issue that African activists believe must be understood — and sometimes adjudicated — on the international stage. Taken together, these continuities demonstrate that the modern struggle for land is not an aberration produced by post-apartheid state failure, but a historical inheritance shaped by more than a century of African mobilisation. Contemporary movements do not stand apart from earlier resistance but rather carry forward the same fundamental demands: that land be restored, that dignity be recognised, and that justice be realised in ways that transform the lived experiences of the dispossessed. Through their testimonies, Africans across generations articulate a shared historical consciousness that understands land not simply as territory but as the essential foundation of freedom. The present-day mobilisation for land restitution and reform therefore represents the latest chapter in an unbroken tradition of struggle — one in which African voices continue to expose the enduring legacies of colonial

dispossession, contest the state’s ongoing failures, and reassert land as indispensable to the fulfilment of liberation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion — The Enduring Legacy of the Act of 1913

The Land Act of 1913 is the most controversial legislation in the history of our country, inaugurating an era of legalised dispossession and systemic inequality whose reverberations persist more than a century later. This study has sought to examine the Act not only as a legislative instrument but as a structural framework that codified racial segregation in the domains of economy, politics, and society. Across the preceding chapters, the evidence demonstrates that the Act did not emerge in a historical vacuum; it represented the culmination of centuries of conquest, colonial expansion, and the racialised reordering of land and labour. The dispossession it formalised was simultaneously economic, spatial, psychological and political — a multi-dimensional rupture that reconfigured the lived realities of black South Africans and set enduring parameters for inequality in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The research has shown that before 1913, African communities maintained complex, sustainable, and spiritually grounded systems of communal land tenure that prioritised stewardship and intergenerational equity. Colonial expansion eroded these systems through conquest, forced removals, and the imposition of Western property laws. By 1913, dispossession was already deeply entrenched; the Act merely consolidated and legalised these practices. Its explicit exclusion of black South Africans from 93 percent of the land institutionalised racial hierarchy, ensuring that the land would serve as both the foundation of white prosperity and the mechanism of black poverty. As Sol Plaatje lamented, Africans awoke “pariahs in the land of their birth.”[139] His observation encapsulates the psychic dislocation and collective humiliation wrought by the Act, transforming not only material conditions but also the moral and symbolic meaning of land.

Across the preceding chapters, the research revealed that the economic, social and political effects of the 1913 Act were deeply interwoven rather than discrete. The loss of land disrupted agricultural productivity, dismantled indigenous economies and entrenched structural dependency. Economic exclusion, in turn, curtailed political participation, as land ownership served as a precondition for franchise rights. Simultaneously, the psychological toll of dispossession — alienation, humiliation and loss of self-worth — reinforced social

[139] Sol Plaatje’s *Native Life in South Africa* (1916), 102.

fragmentation and weakened collective resistance. Thus, the Act produced not merely a single form of injustice but a *systemic ecology of inequality* that operated across generations. Economically, the Act's effects continue to manifest in stark disparities in land ownership and wealth distribution. The confinement of black communities to infertile and overcrowded reserves precluded sustainable agricultural livelihoods and ensured a steady supply of cheap labour for mines and white-owned farms. Contemporary studies confirm that the spatial geography created by the Act — the former "homelands" and "reserves" — remains associated with poverty, unemployment, and infrastructural neglect. The persistence of these spatial inequalities underscores the durability of historical injustice: economic dispossession became an inherited condition.

Politically, the Act functioned as a deliberate tool of disenfranchisement. By linking landownership to political rights, it systematically excluded black South Africans from citizenship and governance. As later chapters demonstrated, this laid the groundwork for apartheid's racial bureaucracy and the Bantustan system. The 1913 Act can thus be seen as both origin and blueprint for the later apartheid state — a point emphasised by historians such as Beinart and Delius, who argue that the Act provided the "architectural skeleton" upon which subsequent segregationist laws were constructed. Its effects on the political imagination were equally profound: Africans were recast as temporary "natives" of reserves, denied belonging in the nation's political community.

Socially and psychologically, the Act severed ancestral ties and destabilised cultural continuity. The relationship between land, ancestry, and identity — central to African cosmology — was ruptured, producing what contemporary scholars term *collective historical trauma*. Families were scattered through forced removals, communities fragmented, and a sense of spiritual exile emerged. These disruptions generated long-term social consequences: weakened kinship structures, erosion of traditional authority, and intergenerational cycles of poverty and disempowerment. The social dislocation caused by the Act thus extended far beyond material deprivation, shaping how communities understood belonging, dignity, and selfhood.

A century after its passage, the Native Land Act continues to cast a long shadow over South Africa's social landscape. The democratic transition of 1994 promised redress through land restitution, redistribution, and tenure reform. Yet, as this dissertation has shown, the enduring

legacy of the Act has proved resistant to policy intervention. Despite multiple land reform programmes — including the RDP of the 1990s and subsequent White Papers on Land Policy — progress has been uneven and often symbolic. Structural barriers such as insecure tenure, inadequate funding, corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiency have impeded substantive transformation. The enduring economic disparities can be directly traced to the original architecture of the 1913 Act. By reserving productive land for white ownership and relegating black people to marginal, environmentally degraded regions, the Act entrenched a dual economy that persists. Former reserves remain underdeveloped and reliant on state support, while commercial agriculture continues to be dominated by a white minority. These patterns of inequality demonstrate that the legacy of the Act is not merely historical; it is structural, material, and ongoing. The resilience of these inequalities underscores an important analytical insight of this dissertation: land reform cannot succeed without confronting the historical consciousness and psychological dimensions of dispossession. Material redistribution alone cannot restore dignity or heal the intergenerational trauma of exclusion. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reminds us, colonisation operates not only through the appropriation of land but also through the "colonisation of the mind." Thus, restorative justice must be understood as both economic and symbolic, requiring the recovery of historical memory, cultural affirmation, and social healing.

The persistence of inequality, unemployment and rural underdevelopment is an indicative of the fact that the country demands a profound reckoning with the historical architecture of dispossession. The task is not only to redistribute land but to reimagine the meaning of ownership, belonging, and justice. In this sense, land reform must be decolonial in spirit — challenging the epistemic and moral frameworks that legitimised exclusion in the first place. This study affirms that restorative justice encompasses three interrelated dimensions that are essential for addressing the enduring consequences of land dispossession. The first dimension, material redress, involves ensuring equitable access to productive land, the provision of secure land tenure, and adequate support for sustainable livelihoods. This component emphasizes the practical restitution of resources that enable communities to rebuild their economic independence and resilience. The second dimension, symbolic restitution, focuses on acknowledging the moral and historical injustices of dispossession while reaffirming the dignity and humanity of those who were systematically deprived of their land. It seeks to heal the psychological and social wounds inflicted by centuries of exclusion through official recognition, apology, and commemoration. The third dimension, structural

transformation, requires confronting and dismantling the deep-rooted economic and spatial inequalities that continue to perpetuate exclusion and marginalization. Together, these three dimensions illustrate that restorative justice is not merely about returning land but about rebuilding justice, equity, and dignity in both material and symbolic forms. Land remains a site of struggle — not only for production but for recognition, belonging, and nationhood. As Hall and Ntsebeza note, the land question remains "the unfinished business of liberation." Until the deep structural inequalities originating in 1913 are addressed, democratic South Africa will continue to bear the imprint of its colonial and apartheid past.

This study concludes that the Act of 1913 was not merely an episode in South African history; it was a foundational event that redefined the country's moral, political, and spatial order. Its endurance lies in the way it shaped the institutions, ideologies and inequalities that followed. The Act transformed black South Africans from autonomous producers into landless labourers, from citizens into subjects and from stewards of land into strangers on their own soil. Understanding this enduring legacy is not an academic exercise alone. It is a moral imperative — one that calls for continued research, dialogue, and action. The process of undoing the legacies of 1913 must be both historical and imaginative: historical, in confronting the full scale of dispossession and its afterlives; imaginative, in envisioning new forms of land justice that transcend the colonial and apartheid frameworks. The Act's legacies remind us that land is more than property — it is memory, identity and the foundation of human dignity. Until that dignity is restored, the dream of a truly free and equal South Africa remains deferred.

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