By the end of the 20th century, an infinite series of conquests, land reforms, and land deals had left 90% of South Africa’s productive land in the hands of 50,000 white farmers (Bradstock 2005). Their land ownership, legally and often financially supported by the state, implied that most South Africans had involuntarily lost their access to land. This slow, prolonged and painful process continues even today: after Apartheid ended in 1994 there are more stories to be told of African farm dwellers who have been forced to leave the land on which they lived and worked, than there are success stories of land redistribution under the new laws of land reform (Bradstock 2005; see also Andrews et al., elsewhere in this volume).

In South Africa large-scale FLAs started at a time when they were not yet the topic of international debate and much earlier than in most African countries. Throughout South African history these land deals and the disputes that came along with them were no different from other land deals or land disputes in that they all reflect contestations between different cultural paradigms. This was the case with conflicts over grazing rights between San hunters and Xhosa pastoralists as much as with territorial conflicts between Zulu warriors and Voortrekkers or labour disputes between landlords and their tenants. Still, white farmers’ views on land rights in late nineteenth century Transvaal shared more resemblance with those of their black tenants and neighbours than with the views of white farmers in late nineteenth century Cape Colony or in late 20th century Transvaal. Even if they were at one time the foreigners who were given title deeds by the government, at this point they can be seen as part of the local community. When in the 1910s and 1920s the national government applied new legislation, advocating increased implementation of private property and new FLAs, this led to a major rural transformation.

After the second Boer War, the Cape Colony, British Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State were unified into the Union of South Africa (1910).
Formally a dominion of the British Crown, but in effect an independent state, the disputes over land use that now arose were often more a result of national perspectives contesting with local ones than of cultural-ethnic differences. The Union government inherited two devastated Afrikaner Republics with a feudal, paternalistic agricultural system, and aspired to make the fertile region prosper. One of the tools was the Natives Land Act (1913), meant to turn black independent farmers into wage labourers to create a powerless, flexible and cheap work force for industries, mines and modernised agriculture. Promoting FLAs was another. The uneducated white landowners and tenants without any liquid capital and the (often more educated and wealthy) black tenants without any legal rights who made up the majority of the local community, had common interests and were initially equally ill-disposed towards the new laws. Many local farmers were forced to leave while their land was allocated to cash-rich ‘foreigners’, coming from either Britain or the Western Cape. Under influence of policy makers, ideologists and circumstances black and white farmers came to be polar opposites in increasingly inter-ethnic conflicts. Moreover, in the nationalist discourses of ethnically based land rights, the farmer became a central metaphor for what was perceived as the inherited responsibility for and right to control over South Africa’s territory, while cultural “traditions were continuously reinvented to back conflicting claims of different social groups” (Cotula, Toulmin and Hesse 2004, 2).

Traditions, however, can only thrive when they convincingly suggest continuity. Like history, fiction is a powerful tool to lend continuity to traditions and to interpret reality. In the first half of the 20th century, Afrikaner historians and novelists worked together to create a past and present that fitted the political plans of the emerging Nationalist party and as such also accompanied the state’s legitimation and dispute resolution regulations around FLAs. Afrikaner literature helped to legitimize changes in land rights and agricultural practices and sweeten the pill for those who lost their livelihood in the process, by rewriting history and thus re-interpreting reality. The following discussion explores the links between literature and political propaganda, to find out which contribution 20th century literature made to the nationalist programme of re-writing traditional claims to the land. To be able to do so we need to consider the genre that was initially targeted to propagandise the state’s policy on land, the *plaasroman* or farm novel, in juxtaposition with the historical events that could have shaped them, as well as literary productions from the African majority of the South African population. Additionally, we may find that by taking a chronological perspective the genre shows differences in