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## It's not the same, but it will eventually feel like home: Response to Marais and Gbadegesin

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### 1 Introduction

This chapter is a response to the chapter titled *Home, assets and place attachment in the urban periphery*. In an African context, we argue that besides the economic aspect of owning a home and space to build a house, a series of values, such as cultural, social, political, and aesthetic, and the histories, identities, and symbolic meanings found in them carry attachments. As pointed out by Marais and Gbadegesin, the relocation of the people of Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo was particularly traumatic in terms of symbolic meaning and land. In line with the ideology of separate development or the promotion of what the National Party (NP) referred to as 'grand apartheid', the question of 'place attachment' became its cornerstone. This was conceptualised as an element of a 'sense of place'. This is developed when people attach deep-seated personal symbolic meanings and values, despite the geographical meaning of such. The relocation of Africans from their 'place of attachment' to places designed to perpetuate the ideals of 'grand apartheid' as envisaged by the apartheid regime is one aspect pointed out in the chapter. Although the authors' focus is on 'home, assets, and place attachment', the political historicisation of the two settlements, namely, Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo, proved relevant to their argument. We agree with the authors that the displacement of the Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo people resulted in serious disruptions and compromised their social capital. We emphasise the importance of place attachment to ensure habitability, participation, and the right to the city in line with the conceptual framework provided by Lefebvre in chapter 1.

## 2 Key arguments

The unjust spatial arrangement that was enacted by the Natives Land Act of 1913 and entrenched by the Population Registration Act of 1950 (read in line with the policy of separate development and its forceful implementation by the NP from the 1960s and into the 1980s that resulted in the resettlement of thousands of black people in the 'homeland') was obsessed with separating citizens on a racial basis. In response to the chapter, space and place attachment should be understood as carrying three characteristics: geographical location, physical parameters and identity composed of meaning and value. Our response is also in line with what Hashemnezhad and others<sup>1</sup> refer to as the importance of a 'sense of place' and 'place attachment'. They note: 'Sense of place is a factor that converts the space into a place with special behavioural and emotional characteristics for individuals.'

### *Why Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo?*

Marais and Gbadegesin's chapter argues that the apartheid system used this form of dislocation and forced removals as ways of organising urbanisation. In their chapter, the authors do not dwell much on the choice of Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo as was been explained in chapter 1 of this publication. However, it should be noted that the two areas represented the homeland/Bantustan system (Thaba 'Nchu being an enclave of Bophuthatswana and Botshabelo destined to be part of Qwaqwa) in the then Orange Free State province. In the mid-1980s, Botshabelo rejected the offer of incorporation into Qwaqwa and, thus, never became a fully-fledged homeland/Bantustan. Contrasting the two brings other dimensions in comprehending the concepts of home, assets, and place and their attachment. The two settlements of Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo, therefore, are used as case studies to explore the concept of 'home' and its connection with attachment to a place of refuge.

Marais and Gbadegesin investigated this concept using social constructionism as their theoretical lens. As mentioned before, the resettlement of people between Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo

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1 H Hashemnezhad, A Heidari & P Mohammad Hoseini "Sense of place" and "place attachment" (2013) 3 *International Journal of Architecture and Urban Development* 5.

occurred when restrictions were increasingly imposed on powerless and vulnerable communities. For the apartheid regime, the common practice was to 'divide and rule', which was also perpetuated by the issue of language differences. They acknowledge that the ethnicity question assisted the apartheid regime in seizing the opportunity to divide the inhabitants of Thaba 'Nchu, essentially Setswana speakers, and those who were moved to Botshabelo, primarily Sesotho speakers, in the wake of Bophuthatswana's independence in 1979. It is then inevitable that the relocation meant that people had to leave the familiar environment where they had lived in proximity, established communal networks and enjoyed collective community life. This also happened in other parts of the country where people were divided ethnically and linguistically. Townships and their spatial arrangements perpetuated this segregation. For example, Soshanguve embraced the Sothos, Shangaans, Ngunis and Vendas.

In evaluating the above, our response explores the notion of home through functionalism and its ability to facilitate place attachment, identity and, ultimately, a sense of belonging in the face of systemic and structural adversity/violence. This sense of belonging should also contribute to the right to the city. This approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation, broadly embedded in the social structures that shape society. Functionalists hold that society is held together by social consensus, in which members agree upon, and work together to achieve, what is best for society. This assertion is demonstrated by how people who inhabited Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo, on the outskirts of Bloemfontein, responded to dislocation, disruptions and forced removal.

The strength of society promotes solidarity and stability. For example, each social institution contributes an important function to communal benefit. The forced removal and dislocation of these people from their homes added more disparities and worsened the question of land dispossession. With these removals, participation in economic development and communal societal practices was compromised. From an Afrocentric viewpoint, embracing the spirit of African values, communal networks and cultural and spiritual connection to the place called 'home' adds value to the importance of this space. We deem these as critical attributes that distinguish the 'home' from the 'house' and which should be understood in the context of the right to the city.

### 3 Distinguishing the 'home' from the 'house' in an African context: A reflection on place attachment

In interrogating the chapter, we start our response by distinguishing between 'home' and 'house', place attachment, and their varied meaning and interpretation of inherent assets and place attachment, followed by concluding arguments. Altman and Low<sup>2</sup> propose that 'attachments may not only be to landscapes solely as physical entities but may be primarily associated with the meanings of and experiences in place which often involve relationships with other people'. This can be read in line with Trentelman's<sup>3</sup> notion of community or neighbourhood attachment, and Williams and Vaske's<sup>4</sup> place dependence. Early studies tended to conceive of place attachment as static. More recently, a dynamic view has emerged that while place attachment is understood as enduring, it is also seen as changing over time,<sup>5</sup> essentially as a form of the need for adaptation, but we thought of it as also a strategy to respond to displacement or forced removal.

In the cases where forced removals resulted in the loss of the 'birthplace', people have shared the loss of spiritual or cultural connection, place, identity, and community network.<sup>6</sup> Common in relocation impact studies are inherent challenges of new places of settlement, such as an arid environment, no resources, no job or school opportunities and poor infrastructure. Elsewhere, some participants phrased it as 'we acted like cats in a strange house ... we wanted to jump but didn't know which way'.<sup>7</sup>

With the apartheid regime's push for separate development, as in other homelands/Bantustans, the inhabitants of Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo were affected in many ways. First, as alluded to by Marais

2 I Altman & S Low (eds) *Place attachment* (1992), cited in S Qingjiu & NZ Maliki 'Place attachment and place identity: Undergraduate students' place bonding on campus' (2013) 91 *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences* 633.

3 CK Trentelman 'Place attachment and community attachment: A primer grounded in the lived experience of a community sociologist' (2009) 22 *Society and Natural Resources* 191.

4 DR Williams & J Vaske 'The measurement of place attachment: Validity and generalisability of a psychometric approach' (2003) 49 *Forest Science* 830.

5 R Hay 'Sense of place in a developmental context' (1998) 18 *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 5.

6 Williams & Vaske (n 4).

7 P Erasmus & M Serekoane 'Removal of a black spot on a white sheet: Impact of forced removal on social structures at Riemvasmaak' in SN Ratha, G Pfeffer & DK Behera (eds) *Contemporary society tribal studies* (2008) 265.

and Gbadegesin, losing one's home due to relocation and resettlement was a deeply disturbing and traumatic experience. The displacement, forced removal and demolished communities were bereft of their social and cultural capital, identity and character. As explained by Erasmus and Serekoane,<sup>8</sup> the question of home cannot be separated from the land, whereby relocated people had to lose their rights to own land. Second, the authors are commended for a part in their chapter that addresses traditions of housing research and their use of social constructionist theory, which emphasises changes in interactions and relationships. Taking this argument further, they contend that '[i]nteractions might, for instance, occur in different places, such as the family's house, a community meeting place, a local government office, or the premises of an estate agent or landlord'.

Although the authors highlight some positives regarding the relocation of the Basotho from Thaba 'Nchu into the newly established Botshabelo and the apartheid regime directing funds for land expansion to the homelands/Bantustans, they do not extensively address the impact of land dispossession that came because of the relocation. While we acknowledge the analysis by these two authors that there were relative economic spin-offs for the homeland/Bantustan system, the consequences of the forced removals, displacement and dislocation of the people of Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo cannot be viewed in terms of economic loss only. We agree with De Beer<sup>9</sup> that land not only provides human beings with access to resources but also creates the frame of reference that people employ to assign/imbue meaning to the land, things, events and even natural phenomena such as mountains, rivers, trees, soil, and so forth.

The use of the urbanisation gaze to rationalise dislocation and forced removal is misleading as it appears that these relocation sites did not enjoy any form of development priority by government agencies. Inevitable in this context are economic stagnation and compromised social and cultural capital. Hopefulness confronts reality as people struggle anew to come to grips with the new land, place and environment. In the case of Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo, we comprehend that the apartheid regime

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<sup>8</sup> As above.

<sup>9</sup> FC de Beer 'Values, resources, and development: A perspective from the Northern Province of South Africa' (1997) 1 *Journal of Social Sciences* 229.

provided those relocated from Thaba 'Nchu into Botshabelo with 'houses' rather than 'homes'. The authors quote Arias:<sup>10</sup> 'Housing refers to the physical attributes, whereas "home" gives meaning to housing and guides how housing is used. Home emphasises an emotional relationship between people and their housing.' As adopted by the authors, this explanation provides a simplistic analysis that, in an African context, has deeper meanings. The authors refer to Somerville's<sup>11</sup> identification of six aspects of 'home', namely, shelter, the feeling of physical warmth, affection, privacy, abode, and roots and identity. Interestingly, Somerville argues for greater integration of the phenomenological and social psychology approaches so that each individual meaning of 'home' can be viewed as a physical, psychological and social construct. However, the chapter does not further interrogate the above to align this with the meanings in an African context.

The authors acknowledge the description by Gurney<sup>12</sup> that 'home' does not only have positive connotations; to some, the attachment refers to a place of worry, unpaid debt and domestic violence. They point out that 'as the research was done in the UK, we expect to find some different discourses in South Africa, where we did our study. More would probably be made of security of tenure and more negative discourses might be expected'. With the above, the authors were convinced that ownership superseded tenure security. With institutionalised displacement and relocation of people under the apartheid regime aligned to migrant labour and maintaining spatial demarcations, the meaning of 'home' and 'house' differed. Fox<sup>13</sup> explains that the centrality of 'home' in human dealings reflects the deep significance of rights and obligations.

Here follows our interpretation of 'home' and 'house', which was not fully embraced by Marais and Gbadegesin in their chapter. As elucidated by Gurney,<sup>14</sup> the concept of 'home' carries more powerful connotations

10 E Arias 'Introduction' in E Arias (ed) *The meaning and use of housing: International perspectives, approaches, and their applications* (1993) 1.

11 P Somerville 'Homelessness and the meaning of home: Rooflessness or rootlessness' (1992) 16 *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 529; P Somerville 'The social construction of home' (1997) 14 *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 228.

12 C Gurney 'Meaning of home and homeownership: Myths, histories and experiences' PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 1996.

13 L Fox 'The meaning of home: A chimerical concept or a legal challenge?' (2002) 29 *Journal of Law and Society* 582.

14 Gurney (n 12).

and attributes than 'house'. Referring to the migrants who would leave their 'homes' to live in the 'houses' provided by the employers in the 'white spots' of South Africa indicated that 'houses' provided no security, safety, or ownership for these people. For example, individuals residing in these 'houses' could not perform rituals as they would in their respective 'homes' back home, where they had an emotional attachment to their place and environment. The apartheid legislation also restricted the movement of migrant labourers from one area to the other without permission; thus, no personalisation of space and place by these people. The Basotho's removal from Thaba 'Nchu to Botshabelo (and those who were forcefully relocated from the neighbouring farms) indicated losing attachments with ancestral lands. Without a doubt, the concept of 'home' and assets (both emotionally and physically) is closely associated with place attachment, a positive relationship between people and places. In an African context, where traditional and cultural protocols determine the livelihood of individuals and communities, place attachment could mean fondness for a sense of place and has wider implications when people are relocated and leads to disruption of their social strata.

In an African context, 'home' provides a specific place identity. Identity refers to describing or conceptualising the self and connections to geographical locations.<sup>15</sup> According to Proshansky and others,<sup>16</sup> the concept of 'place identity' was considered as an individual's strong emotional attachment to a particular place or environment setting. Connection and attachment are thus established through birth and planting of umbilical cords and burial practices. After this, the common phrase to demonstrate connection and attachment refers to the place as ancestral land.<sup>17</sup>

In their chapter, the authors, under the sub-heading 'Place attachment', distinguish between two main elements of place attachment, namely 'place identity' and 'place dependence'. The former refers to symbolic and

15 P Devine-Wright & S Clayton 'Introduction to the special issue: Place, identity and environmental behaviour' (2010) 30 *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 267.

16 HM Proshansky, AK Fabian & R Kaminoff 'Place-identity: Physical world socialisation of the self (1983)' in J Gieseking and others (eds) *The people, place, and space reader* (2014) 77.

17 P Erasmus & M Serekoane 'Removal of a black spot on a white sheet: Impact of forced removal on social structures at Riemvasmaak' in SN Ratha, G Pfeffer & DK Behera (eds) *Contemporary society tribal studies* (2008) 265.



emotional elements connected with home, and the latter to the functional value people find in the physical environment. Place attachment can therefore develop because of working in a specific place. According to the authors, place attachment develops for many reasons, such as time spent in a place, socio-economic factors, settlement attributes and infrastructure, homeownership, social networks, and environmental factors. Table 2 in Marais and Gbadegesin's chapter shows the discourses of 'home' in Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo. Through data analysis, the authors recorded 13 themes. The data highlight the number of responses related to each theme.

Interestingly, from their analysis, they concluded that there was no substantial difference between Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo in how people provide meaning to 'home'. Their analysis focused on three aspects, namely the discourses of emotions of 'home', how the discourses are related to housing assets, and how the 'home' and housing assets contribute to place attachment. People change space to the concept of place based on their social bonds, feeling and emotions.

In their chapter, the authors note that the emotional connection to 'home' was the most prominent theme they coded. Thaba 'Nchu and Botshabelo successfully positioned the plight of these areas in a proper historical context against the history of dislocation and forced removals. The fact that the authors conducted oral interviews with some of the inhabitants helps to capture a detailed overview of the interviewees' life stories. It was interesting to note from the interviewees that despite the negative impact of resettlements, some held positive reflections. This was obviously in reference to the mistreatment that some of these people experienced on the farms. Their relocation to Thaba 'Nchu or Botshabelo, therefore, gave them a sense of ownership when they were provided with 'houses'. On the issue of ownership, nearly 22 per cent of their codes were about the role of ownership in understanding 'home'. As they explained, '[t]he literature on place attachment emphasises the importance of ownership in the development of place attachment, and homeownership is an essential aspect of asset-based welfare policies'. One important aspect of 'house' ownership is inheritance. If people are forcefully removed from their 'houses' due to apartheid legislation, it can erode the possibility of inheritance.

Regarding housing and 'house', the authors assert that the former promotes the health and well-being of human beings, which are essential



preconditions for effective participation in the labour market and can also be a base from which to generate income. To justify the above, they give examples of generating income by running a business from home or renting a room to a lodger. Assets can thus provide psychological advantages and create a sense of security.

#### 4 Making the unfamiliar familiar: Key lessons from place attachment

There are many approaches to place theory. Given the multiple research traditions based on different and often incompatible epistemological foundations and philosophical assumptions, the conceptualisation of the notion of the place remains fluid. To this end, we align ourselves with Morgan's<sup>18</sup> views of place as a subjective experience of embodied human existence. Important for the paper, and in line with Florek,<sup>19</sup> is the 'affective link that people establish with specific settings, where they tend to remain and where they feel comfortable and safe'. Effectively, we understand place attachment as a positive connection to a familiar place. The connection occurs between people and their meaningful environment.<sup>20</sup> Examples of people's connection to place that is often discussed in the literature are place and attachment,<sup>21</sup> place and identity,<sup>22</sup> a sense of place, place dependence,<sup>23</sup> and community attachment.<sup>24</sup> Although we acknowledge the constructivist view that sees place as a socially constructed phenomenon,<sup>25</sup> we align ourselves with the

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18 P Morgan 'Towards a developmental theory of place attachment' (2010) 30 *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 11.

19 K Florek 'No place like home: Perspectives on place attachment and impacts on city management' (2011) 1 *Journal of Town and City Management* 347.

20 K Chow & M Healey 'Place attachment and place identity: First-year undergraduates making the transition from home to university' (2008) 28 *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 362.

21 BS Jorgensen & RC Stedman 'A comparative analysis of predictors of sense of place dimensions: Attachment to, dependence on, and identification with lakeshore properties' (2006) 79 *Journal of Environmental Management* 316.

22 HM Proshansky 'The city and self-identity' (1978) 10 *Environment and Behaviour* 147; Proshansky and others (n 16).

23 Hashemnezhad and others (n 1); Florek (n 18).

24 Trentelman (n 3); TH Lee & YL Shen 'The influence of leisure involvement and place attachment on destination loyalty: Evidence from recreationists walking their dogs in urban parks' (2013) 33 *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 76.

25 See MV Giuliani & R Feldman 'Place attachment in a developmental and cultural context' (1993) 13 *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 267; Hay (n 5).

phenomenological and humanistic approaches that link the deeper significance of place to human existence and the subjective, emotional quality of people's relationship with places.<sup>26</sup> The broad themes that explain people's connection to place vary across individual communities and societies; effectively, that contestation emanating from varied and often conflicting and competing cultural, political, and economic interests is inevitable in any understanding of place.<sup>27</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

The relationships between people and places remain complex and evolve through space and time. This chapter contributes to the conversation on forced removal and dislocation and the subsequent implications for place and attachment. The chapter indicates how the practices of 'urbanisation' or urban planning are entangled in the political ideology that promotes forms of social injustice, such as economic exclusion. Despite the obvious political intention to displace, dispossess, and dehumanise, both communities employed cultural practices to assign/imbue meaning to the 'new' land, things, events, and even natural phenomena such as mountains, rivers, trees, soil, and so forth, which subsequently aided place attachment.

Finally, the settlement in Botshabelo has not necessarily created a home or the right to the city. The conclusion that viewing Botshabelo and Thaba 'Nchu as a rural home has merit but could easily be seen as exclusionary. Maybe the complexity is visible in further urban exclusion, a lack of access to the right of the city, an attempt to create place attachment, and as a form of a rural home. Dealing with these complexities also requires a more nuanced understanding of 'home' in the African context.

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26 Morgan (n 17).

27 See T Creswell *Place: A short introduction* (2004).

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