

# The usable past and socio-environmental justice: From Lady Selborne to Ga-Rankuwa

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## *Abstract*

This article presents a case study in forced removals and their ramifications from 1905 to 1977 from the perspective of socio-environmental history. It depicts environmental damages and misunderstandings suffered due to forced removals from Pretoria in a location called Lady Selborne (currently known as Suiderberg) and Ga-Rankuwa where some of the displaced were relocated. The article demonstrates that forced removals did not only result in people losing their historical lands, properties and material possessions, but they lost their inheritance – homes, history and their sense of being and connectedness. The article depicts the complex picture of the ramifications of forced removals among former inhabitants of Lady Selborne where the township was a scenic home, with fertile soils and situated closer to the city centre - where they experienced environmental justice and felt human in the process. With the forced removals and relocation in Ga-Rankuwa the former inhabitants of Lady Selborne were resettled in a place with infertile soil on the outskirts of Pretoria. The article illustrates that successive white governments (from the colonial period till the reign of the National Party under De Klerk) and many scholars have tried to downplay African environmental ethics and to dismiss them as “superstition”. This resulted in forced removals and consequently in Africans being apathetic to environmental issues in the resettlement area; Ga-Rankuwa. This impacted on the oral traditional environmental education on environmental preservation which was ignored by Africans and successive governments and this hastened the deterioration of African environmental settlements in Ga-Rankuwa. Thus, in this article it will be argued that through environmental justice that embraces the “Usable past” of African environmental ethics, environmental education and activism is possible.

**Keywords:** Useable past; Environmental justice; Lady Selborne; Ga-Rankuwa; Socio-environmental perspective; Afro-centric methodology; Forced removals and resettlement.

## Introduction

### Going back to my roots

Zippin' up my boots goin' back to my roots yeah  
To the place of my birth back down to earth.  
I've been standing in the rain  
Drenched and soaked with pain  
Tired of short time benefits  
And being exposed to the elements.  
I'm homeward bound  
got my head turned around.  
Zippin' up my boots goin' back to my roots yeah.  
To the place of my birth  
Back down to earth.  
Ain't talkin' 'bout no roots in the land  
Talkin' 'bout the roots in the man.  
I feel my spirit gettin' old  
It's time to recharge my soul  
I'm zippin' up my boots  
Goin' back to my roots.<sup>1</sup>

The roots of South Africa's past have pivoted on issues surrounding land and the plans regarding land use. There have been active attempts to dispossess the Africans from their land, to reshape their environment and to describe or “imagine” the land in the mental paradigm of the white settlers.<sup>2</sup> The powerful white colonialists drew strength from their relationship with the environment in ways that entrenched their hegemony and retained their positions by manipulating beneficial uses of the land against the powerless Africans (either in terms of class or race, or even gender).<sup>3</sup> The colonial state and its successors continued to entrench oppressive systems that drastically restricted African access to land and define it from the white settlers' social context. Thus a stark social dichotomy predicated on land-ownership and landlessness existed on issues pertaining to the most valuable asset: land. In the twentieth century, the

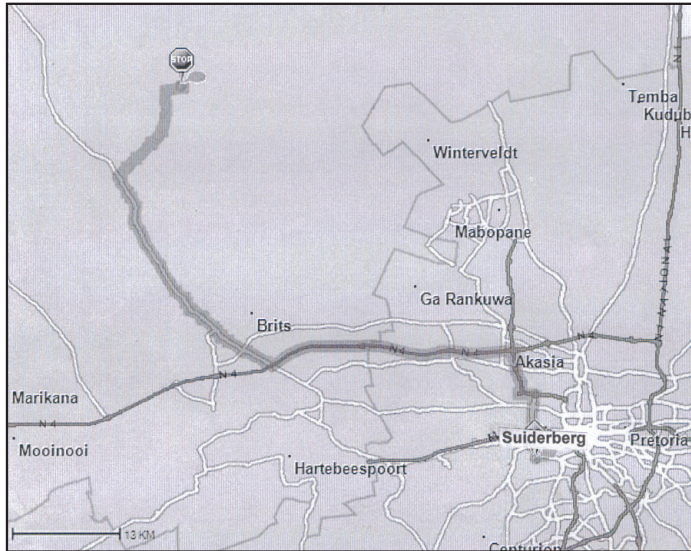
1 L Dozier, “Going back to my roots lyrics” (available at: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/going-back-to-my-roots-lyrics-odyssey.html>, as accessed on 7 March 2013).

2 A Crosby, *Ecological imperialism: The biological expansion of Europe 900–1900* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 94.

3 N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice: A South African history* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 4.

laws that guided forced removals accumulated from the 1913 and 1936 Native Land Acts, the Influx Control Act of 1945, the 1950 and 1956 Group Areas Act and the Promotion of Bantu Self Government Act of 1959. By 1994 these laws were responsible for the forced removals of almost 4 million people to so called black designated areas; resettlement areas – Ga-Rankuwa (Pretoria), KwaMashu (Durban), Langa (Cape Town) to mention but a few. Many such resettlement areas are environmentally degraded due to the impact of forced removals. The song quoted above by the solo artist Odyssey, is relevant in dealing with some of the environmental problems in such resettlement areas. The song encapsulates proposals made in this article - for environmental justice, land restitution and environmental activism to be realised in black areas. There must be changes in systems of land use and rights whereby not only the dominant western paradigm on environmental conservation should be considered but also other ideas and paradigms such as the Sotho-Tswana in this instance on environmental ideologies – hence the idea of the “usable past” which embraces traditional African customs and beliefs<sup>4</sup>.

Image 1: A map illustrating Ga-Rankuwa and Lady Selborne (Suiderberg)



Source: Yellow Pages Maps and Directions (available at: [http://www.saexplorer.co.za/maps/nwest/eastern\\_municipality.asp](http://www.saexplorer.co.za/maps/nwest/eastern_municipality.asp), as accessed on 20 June 2013).

4 The idea a “useable” as articulated in 1918 essay by American critic, Van Wyck Brooks, argues that the past can be used to interpret and understand the present which is relevant in this study because through understanding the Sotho-Tswana past cultural and traditional practices on land use it will be a step towards the repairing of the environment in the resettlement areas like Ga-Rankuwa. Cited in L Zamora, *The usable past – the imagination of history in recent fiction of the Americans* (Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 1997).

The case study of Lady Selborne (currently known as Suiderberg) and Ga-Rankuwa where some of the displaced due to the Group Areas Act of 1950 and 1956 were relocated is used to investigate the ramifications of forced removals through a socio-environmental perspective. It traces the reasons and solutions to environmental degradation and apathy in resettlement areas such as Ga-Rankuwa. The focal group chosen is the Sotho-Tswana because they were the majority in Lady Selborne around the period under study. In the 1950s there were 1000 Sotho-Tswana, 321 Ngunis, 167 Shangaans, 125 Coloureds, 97 Whites, 6 Indians and 5 Vendas in Lady Selborne.<sup>5</sup>

The Sotho-Tswana ascribed the land with sacred character: it had the potential to build the people or destroy them; hence the Sotho-Tswana believed that they had to care for it as their inheritance (*lefa*) from ancestors to be preserved for the future generations. Land was perceived as a home for the living, the dead, animals and plants. These components had to live co-operatively to ensure a sustainable life for all. So if one component failed to co-exist with the others, it would mean disturbance of the entire cultural, social and ecosystem of the Sotho-Tswana and would lead to either natural or social disaster.<sup>6</sup> This meant that land and the environment had to be respected, an idea expressed as *gotlhompwa* in Setswana – which refers to “avoidance rules between persons and between persons and certain places and objects”.<sup>7</sup> This implies that in African culture and tradition certain people, places and animals are avoided as a sign of respect. Colonial officials largely misconstrued the African understanding of nature and the environment as it was the perception of the subordinate subjects: totally different from the way they related to and understood the environment. This is the challenge which Carruthers refers to, historiographically; “issues relating to indigenous knowledge [are neglected], [simply] are touched upon rather than explored in any detail” and this poses the problem with which this article wrestles.<sup>8</sup> This article suggests that the ideology of land for the Basotho and Batswana has deep meaning as it is enveloped in religious rites and beliefs. The environment and our anthropogenic engagement with it play a major and changing role in this ideology and requires delineation. Changing ideas about respect for land,

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5 J Carruthers, “Urban land claims in South Africa: The case of Lady Selborne township, Pretoria, Gauteng”, *Kleio*, XXX11, 2000, p. 12.

6 M Kunene, *Anthem of the decades: A Zulu epic dedicated to the women of Africa* (London, Heinemann, 1981), p. xxiv.

7 H Kuckertz, “Ukuhlonipha as idiom of moral reasoning in Mpondo”, P McAllister (ed.), *Culture and the common place* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1997), p. 312.

8 J Carruthers, “Environmental history in Southern Africa: An overview”, S Dovers et al, *South Africa's environmental history cases & comparisons* (Athens, Cape Town, Ohio University Press, David Philip, 2002), p. 7.

the environment and nature in specific African communities warrant closer examination and delineation, focusing in particular on how the ideology has changed over time in reaction to socio-political changes.

In this article the focus moves from the premise that the issue of land rights and land use in South Africa is highly controversial, deeply entangled in the vagaries of history. South Africa has inherited problems in land distribution, land ownership and environmental degradation, at least in part, because of the history of forced removals. As Mbaio has argued, it has “left a complex and difficult legacy of insecurity on land tenure, landlessness, poverty among black people and [been a cause of] inefficient land administration”, environmental management and environmental injustices [my emphasis].<sup>9</sup>

This study seeks to explore how segregation caused environmental oppression. Thus the approach will be the socio-environmental scope drawing from the Africanist paradigm. The focus is on the Sotho-Tswana understanding of the environment and nature and their relations with the non-human world, and will explain how a community related to the environment as they interacted with each other, emphasising issues of social power and identity.<sup>10</sup> The Africanist approach emphasises African nationalism and pan-Africanist ideals of black pride. The approach looks at forced removals as a system that contributed to the regression rather than progression of Africans. It also describes colonial annexation as destructive of pre-colonial land use practices. Africanist scope is useful because it emphasises the importance of land and the environment as the cornerstone for Africans.<sup>11</sup> While several academic writings on environmental history try to study African themes from within their contexts, they often use the same Eurocentric tools in analysing African tradition and culture. As Ama Mazana has argued: “Although most Africans, on the Continent as well as in the Diaspora, have, at least in theory, put an end to colonial rule to which we were subjected for many years, we nonetheless still find ourselves in a state of mental subjugation... The reason for this is that colonisation was not simply an enterprise of economic exploitation and political control ... but also an on-going enterprise of conceptual distortion and invasion leading

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9 MLM Mbaio, “Undoing the injustices of the past: Restitution of rights in land in post apartheid South Africa, with special reference to North West Province”, *Journal for Judicial Science*, 27(2), 2002, p. 91.

10 The Africanist approach attempts to assert the importance of Africans in the making of history. In this thesis the genre is relevant as it studies the socio-environmental history of the Africans from their own perspectives and show that they also played an important part in the making of their own history.

11 EM Letsoalo, *Land reform in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1987); S Plaatje, *Native life in South Africa before and since the European war and the Boer War* (London, King, 1916).

to widespread confusion, and ultimately, “mental incarceration”.<sup>12</sup> Therefore it is important to “decolonise” African environmental history and study it from the perspectives of the cultures and traditions of various African peoples.

This sense of (African) agency is addressed in the two other historiographic paradigms that inform this article. Social history has long insisted on the agency of ordinary people to influence parts of their lives, although they had to accept their broader contextual circumstances. The interviews and discussions of Sotho-Tswana views on environmental change and modification, seek to address the paucity of African accounts about the land and its resources. Oral testimony proves to be a useful tool in the pursuit of environmental histories. An effective model is provided by essays in Bonyhady and Griffiths’ *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia* that have used oral history to comprehend popular relationships with places. In interpreting narratives that “take root” in specific environmental locales they demonstrate that identity is entangled with a sense of belonging, a vernacular politics in the process of constructing human identities. For example, several chapters in Beinart and McGregor’s *Social History and African Environments* reveal the importance of place-situated designations (“river people”, or “mountain people”) in forging distinctive ethnic identities, especially within nation states from which they feel marginalised. This is not restricted to Africa: for example, Schama’s *Landscape and Memory*, showed how landscape traditions were “the primary bedrock” of European and American nationalisms, with woodland, waterways, and mountains as agents in the configuration of Western identities (which were often shaped in opposition to severe environmental conditions).<sup>13</sup>

The history of forced removals has been studied from different genres (Afrikaner nationalistic, Africanist, Liberal and Revisionist perspectives) and has been highly politicised and other aspects such as the socio-environmental scope have been neglected or only briefly mentioned. The article by MC Kgari-Masondo detected a lacuna, which is important to expose, which is the socio-environmental aspect of land dispossession.<sup>14</sup> It gave vital explanations of the existence of environmental history of the Sotho-Tswana and affirmed the proposal about re-languaging “environment” to unlock the environmental

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12 A Mazama, *The Afrocentric paradigm*, Africa (Trenton, World Press, 2003), pp. 3-4.

13 Schama demonstrates, for example, how German nationalism was indissoluble from its “wild” forest areas, from the sixteenth-century landscape paintings by Altdorfer to the mythology of the Nazis. S Schama, *Landscape and memory* (New York, Alfred A Knopf, 1995).

14 MC Kgari-Masondo, “A home makes one Motho’ – the idea of ‘humanness’, ‘home’ and history in Lady Selborne’s forced removals, circa 1905 to 1977”, *Historia*, 53, 2 November 2008, pp. 70-97.



history of Africans. Sotho-Tswana conservation ideals which are termed *go boloka tlhago* held that nature has to be preserved for future generations through rituals and the ethic of *blompo* (respect) of physical sites (graves, shrines) and mental constructs (laws, values, ethics and totems). Due to land alienation through the process of forced removals, the new residents of Ga-Rankuwa experienced problems in their relationship with their environment. This is highlighted by Khan, who states that:<sup>15</sup>

The question of land is a crucial factor and its bitter, divisive legacy has to be considered when examining South Africa's environmental history, particularly since it is within the context of the land that most blacks take stance on environmental issues.

### **A brief political and environmental history from Lady Selborne to Ga-Rankuwa**

Lady Selborne was situated where the suburb now called Suiderberg is located, against the south slope of the Magaliesberg some sixteen kilometres northwest of Pretoria's city centre. Lady Selborne was established in 1905 as a township where black Africans could own land.<sup>16</sup> Land was available to different racial groups in the township, including black Africans seeking work and accommodation. The area was surrounded by some white settlements such as Daspoort, Hercules and Innesdale,<sup>17</sup> and was established through a "coloured" syndicate that purchased a portion of a farm (Zandfontein) through their agents, T Le Fleur and CM de Vries. Ownership of the farm was transferred to De Vries on the 26 September 1906, with 440 plots available for purchase to the public.<sup>18</sup> The Minister of Native Affairs approved Lady Selborne as a place for the residence of black Africans in 1936. Inter-racial land-ownership occurred because the sellers did not discriminate between buyers and this resulted in *de facto* integration. The target market, small plots and low prices prompted the Transvaal Surveyor-General to refer to Lady

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15 F Khan, "Contemporary South African environmental response: An historical and socio-political evaluations with particular reference to blacks" (MA, UCT, 1990), p. 15.

16 National Archives Repository, Pretoria (NAR), Transvaal Education Department (TES), 4134: Report of the Departmental Committee, "Statement embodying particulars and survey of the affairs of Lady Selborne", 1949, p. 61.

17 NAR, TES, 4134: Report of the Departmental Committee, "Statement embodying particulars and survey of the affairs of Lady Selborne", 1949, p. 61.

18 See J Carruthers, "Urban land claims in South Africa..." , *Kleio*, XXX11, 2000, p. 26.

Selborne as “practically a location”.<sup>19</sup> It was named after Lady Beatrix Maud Cecil Selborne, whose husband was High Commissioner of South Africa and Governor of the Transvaal and Orange River colonies until Union in 1910.<sup>20</sup>

### ***The Policy of forced removals in Lady Selborne 1948-1961***

Through the Policy of Forced removals in 1948, the National Party government implemented rigorous evictions of the community of Lady Selborne. A letter dated 12 November 1949 from the Provincial Secretary to the Secretary for Finance clearly illustrates this desire to destroy Lady Selborne with an eye to “controlling the area”.<sup>21</sup> Lady Selborne as a township grew and was later that year incorporated into the City of Pretoria with 1952 registered properties.<sup>22</sup> Carruthers has pointed out that “from the outset, the residents of Lady Selborne were politically sophisticated and resisted the ever-enveloping tentacles of state control over their daily lives”.<sup>23</sup> The residents continued to complain about high rates and underdevelopment which were ignored by the Hercules’ Town Council. Property prices were inflated: about £500 per stand in order to prevent more blacks from buying plots in the area, whilst the neighbouring white areas’ plots were lower at around £90 to £250.<sup>24</sup> The National Party government promised to destroy Lady Selborne, portraying the township as an overpopulated health hazard, and delegated the task to the Pretoria City Council, which had already made such a proposal<sup>25</sup>. Its argument was essentially that the area was a “Black Spot”, unwanted and close to whites.<sup>26</sup>

By 1956 the Pretoria City Council finally decided to destroy Lady Selborne but needed a firm Act to support this aim.<sup>27</sup> Its frustrations stemmed from the fact that no rezoning of Pretoria could be implemented without Lady

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19 Transvaal Archives Repository, Pretoria, (TA), Governor of the Transvaal Colony (GOV), 828/PS17/65/05, 21 November 1905.

20 TA, Pretoria, GOV, 828/PS17/65/05, 22 November 1905.

21 NAR, TES, 3900 F19/269: Letter, Provincial Secretary / Secretary for Finance, 12 November 1949.

22 TK Sonjica, “Group Areas Act, Ethnic Cleansing”, 2002 (available at: [land.pwv.gov.za/journal/fourland.html](http://land.pwv.gov.za/journal/fourland.html), as accessed on 18 March 2005).

23 J Carruthers, “Urban land claims in South Africa...”, *Kleio*, XXX11, 2000, 2.

24 NAR, TES, 4134: Report of the Departmental Committee, “Statement embodying particulars and survey of the affairs of Lady Selborne”, 1949, p. 62.

25 NAR TES4134, Report of the Departmental Committee, “Statement embodying particulars and survey of the affairs of Lady Selborne”, 1949, p. 64.

26 M Horrell, *The Group Areas Act – Its effects on human beings* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1956), p. 48.

27 M Horrell, *The Group Areas Act...*, p. 48.



Selborne as a “Black Spot” within white settlements. This hurdle was overcome in 1956 through the passing of the Group Areas Amendment Act, which gave power to the Group Areas Board to deal with areas approved for the residence of blacks. The coup de grace was delivered by Proclamation no. 104 of 20 October 1961, which declared Lady Selborne a white area.<sup>28</sup> Removals of residents by the police started in November 1961.

### ***Environmental history and forced removals from Lady Selborne to Ga-Rankuwa***

From research undertaken in Ga-Rankuwa the residents of Lady Selborne were attached to each other and their environment.<sup>29</sup> They took pride in their area as it gave them identity and was a locus of their history. The local sense of identity was able to cut across religious, cultural, racial and class divides. The community lived together with different races and could assist each other despite such differences. According to an interviewee R Kgari, business owners were able to assist all races equally, if they had no money, which was a sign of close community relationships.

The State alienated the community of Lady Selborne from their environment by reducing access to land and water,<sup>30</sup> and used “scientific” conservation policies to limit both by introducing high bond rates as a measure of stopping blacks from buying property in the township. This alienation did not cause them to disengage with the land in terms of subsistence farming, and they remained committed to cultivation because most forms of entrepreneurship such as owning businesses were denied them through poverty and expensive rent and bonds. Residents tried to retain environmental control by actively involving themselves in the administration of their area through the Health and Village Committees that were not very successful because all the powers rested on the Hercules Town Council. People were becoming more politically aware and active through committees and political organizations such as the Black Sash the African National Congress, the Communist Party and the Pan African Congress, which motivated the community to resist its displacement.

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28 *South African Government Gazette*, 92(2) (Pretoria, Authority, 6 October 1961), p. 3.

29 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interviews, R Kgari (Domestic worker, Isando, Johannesburg), 25 June 2004, W Kgari (Assistant Secretary, Bonus Card/Uni-bank, Pretoria City Centre), 27 June 2004, T Tshweni (Domestic worker, Isando, Johannesburg), 28 June 2004, Sekhu (Housewife), 28 June 2004 and M Manamela (Housewife), 30 June 2004.

30 J Carruthers, “Urban land claims in South Africa...”, *Kleio*, XXX11, 2000, pp. 28-29.

Success in this struggle in the 1940s motivated the residents to fight against the forced removals of the 1960s, albeit with little success. Forced removals destroyed the community spirit and environmental attachment that the residents had enjoyed since 1905. Displacement from Lady Selborne meant a withdrawal from history for many residents because their land had given them a sense of their own history since 1905. They were now compelled to construct a new history where they would always have a nostalgic attachment to Lady Selborne.

Ga-Rankuwa was one of the resettlement areas identified to accommodate some of the former residents of Lady Selborne. The area was established in 1961 with the purpose of accommodating African communities who were displaced through the Group Areas Act from Lady Selborne, Bantule, Newclare, Marabastad, Rama, Eastwood and other neighbouring farms. The area was named after the Bakgatla headman, Rankuwa Boikhutso. 'Rankuwa' means "we are accepted". Subsequently the word "Ga" was inserted by the community to imply "we are not accepted" because they complained about the soil that was red and infertile and the under resourced conditions of the area. The area was proclaimed a township by Proclamation 448 of 1965 and allowed to accommodate Africans from diverse ethnic groups including the amaNguni, Vendas and Shangaans.<sup>31</sup>

Those moved from Lady Selborne had no sense of historical continuity in Ga-Rankuwa and a feeling of historical rupture emerged from the forced nature of the removal. The Sotho-Tswana viewed a person as a constant work-in-progress, not a state of being but a state of becoming. This means that the Sotho-Tswana definition of a person was disrupted and arrested through loss of land. Those resettled became apathetic towards the environment, were reduced to dependency, in a state of feeling "less human" called *seffi* (bad luck). Forced to focus on survival strategies, many residents of Ga-Rankuwa saw environmental issues as inconsequential. They romanticized the past life in Lady Selborne but did not implement its lessons. This can be termed resettlement memory reversal because the resettled tend to restart their historical journey using their memories, often causing misery and rejection of the present. Zwingman argues that:<sup>32</sup>

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31 NAR, Department of Bantu Administration and Development (BAO), 7818T60/2/1547/1: Memorandum, the Tswana Vigilance Committee, Commissioner General Tswana Territorial Authority, no date. The memo mentions that there were also amaZulu and amaTsonga in Ga-Rankuwa.

32 M Nash, *Black uprooting from white* (Braamfontein, South African Council of Churches, 1980), p. 78.

When life is threatened the reaction is physical but where total loss of love is involved the reaction is mental. People suffering from ‘uprooted’ and reacting negatively are in a ‘borderline state’ and their behaviour cannot be measured and judged by the norms of ordered intact society.

Many former residents of Lady Selborne changed their relationship with their environment in the resettlement area as a means of protesting against their loss of “home”. The cycle of poverty in Ga-Rankuwa meant that, even though many former tenants may have felt “humanised” by their new position as land owners, few could manage to pay to develop their new property. Underdeveloped infrastructure and lack of recreational facilities such as cinemas and sports facilities in Ga-Rankuwa heightened nostalgia for Lady Selborne. Some felt that the new community had potential but most deemed that the community spirit that prevailed in Lady Selborne was non-existent in Ga-Rankuwa. This represented a key failure of resettlement as the Sotho-Tswana saw community as a vital means of defining the self. This exposed for some of the interviewees, that the new area would always be the ‘other place’ and not “home”.<sup>33</sup> The concept of a “home”<sup>34</sup> was dynamic from immovable to movable “home” hence some residents started engaging with the environment through food production, which illustrates that “hard times, however do not dictate that history be about decline, degradation, or victimisation”.<sup>35</sup> Land restitution is also an illustration of this. When asked about whether the former landlords want to be reinstated to Lady Selborne, they answered unanimously in the negative. The narrative of land restitution and movable home also highlights the resilience of community ideas and practices towards the land, which were increasingly challenged by the agenda of outsiders such as those who had businesses but did not stay in Ga-Rankuwa.

The move from Lady Selborne to Ga-Rankuwa caused massive shifts in people’s perceptions of themselves, others and the environment. Removals represented more than social injustice, it meant environmental injustice. It has been argued by MC Kgari-Masondo that the community of Lady Selborne cared for the environment and interacted with it (and each other) relatively harmoniously.<sup>36</sup> Although there were problems such as the absence of running water and a proper sewage system, the residents were largely content and did

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33 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, T Tshweni, 28 June 2004, Andrew (Secretary, Pretoria Municipality), 28 June 2004 and M Manamela, 30 June 2004.

34 See MC Kgari-Masondo, “A home makes one Motho” ..., *Historia*, 53, 2 November 2008, pp. 70-97.

35 N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice: A South African history*, p. 208.

36 MC Kgari-Masondo, “A home makes one Motho” ..., *Historia* 53, 2 November 2008, pp. 70-97.

not initially pay high rates.<sup>37</sup>

High rates in Lady Selborne were later instituted after the installation of taps. For many interviewees, such as former landlady Mrs Sekhu, the introduction of rates for water actually interfered with traditional subsistence patterns because they controlled the amount of water to be used as compared to the wells where they could utilise water the way they wanted.<sup>38</sup> There were also environmental power issues that undermined unity in the township. Many former tenant interviewees displayed dissatisfaction towards this class-stratification.<sup>39</sup> The interviewees did not consciously experience land ownership in terms of class distinction in Lady Selborne, but critical analysis reveals such divisions, albeit subtle. Powerful landlords arrogated the most advantageous environmental resources to themselves and could engage in cultivation while denying their tenants access to food production.<sup>40</sup> According to Jacobs, the issue of power is a significant consideration in environmental history “and in order to understand the historical dynamic between people and the biophysical environment, it is necessary to identify influence, authority, and material advantages in society”.<sup>41</sup> However, while capitalist production certainly existed, there is evidence to suggest that people in Lady Selborne collaborated with each other and shared food such as vegetables and fruit with those who needed assistance.<sup>42</sup>

Much of this changed in Ga-Rankuwa, as landownership became a benchmark for class and the construction of identity. As Cohnert, *et al*, have argued, “apartheid era spatial configurations continue to shape group identities”.<sup>43</sup> Yet, the former tenants of Lady Selborne had been relegated to the lower strata of the community in Lady Selborne and actually saw their humanness being affirmed by resettlement in Ga-Rankuwa, even though they leased their plots. In contrast, former landlords persisted in using their previous status as the upper class to pursue their struggle to return to Lady Selborne. They also manipulated their new-found status of “have not” as a symbol of solidarity with their former tenants in order to fight displacement.

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37 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, R Kgari, 25 June 2004.

38 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, Sekhu, 28 June 2004.

39 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, I Mvula (Domestic worker, Johannesburg), 24 June 2004, E Mohlahledi (Housewife), 29 June 2004, P Matlaila, (Security guard, Bartley's Bank, Pretoria), 29 June 2004, M Matlaila (Domestic worker, Pretoria), 29 June 2004 and M Madumo (Housewife), 30 June 2004.

40 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, M Madumo, 30 June 2004.

41 N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice...*, p. 211.

42 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, R Kgari, 25 June 2004.

43 S Horstmeier & S Cornelissen, “The social and political construction of identities in the New South Africa: An analysis of Western Cape province”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40(1), 2002, p. 57.

However, this was unsuccessful and there was no active fight against resettlement in Ga-Rankuwa because there was little common ground between tenants and landlords as the former were initially happy in the relocation area while the latter were enraged by the absence of free plots. Those who managed to buy plots constituted the upper class, which carried with them the status of *batho* (humans).<sup>44</sup> More so, the relocation area came with its environmental injustice and historical rapture.

### **Ramifications of forced removals from Lady Selborne to Ga-Rankuwa<sup>45</sup>**

The roots of our present system of exploitation and oppression have had to be sought and exposed through re-examination of the past.

This quote reflects the idea that the environmental problems that plague Ga-Rankuwa can be traced back to its history. Harris states “to be open to the past is, simply, to be open to the roots of what we are, the past is the contrast and perspective for present”.<sup>46</sup> Implicit to Harris’s hypothesis is the idea that environmental problems – particularly those of land scarcity, land degradation and dispossession – have to be researched from the perspective of the past. In this article both an historical socio-environmental perspective with an Afrocentric approach have been used, that have briefly facilitated the exploration of the Sotho-Tswana perceptions of the environment. Many scholars who deal with forced removals have explored the ramifications of the process in changing the lives of black people<sup>47</sup> while some scholars have gone beyond the social sphere and focused on the environmental impact.<sup>48</sup> Such analyses, however, have not included the changing and historically-constructed meaning of land within the forcibly removed communities and its relationship with social identity.

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44 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, R Kgari, 24 June 2004, T Tshweni, 28 June 2004, Sekhu, 28 June 2004, V Maphalare, (Housewife), 28 June 2004, E Andrew 29, June 2004, E Mohlahledi, 29 June 2004, P Matlaila, 29 June 2004 and M Manamela, 29 June 2004.

45 B Bozzoli, “History, experience and culture”, B Bozzoli (ed.), *Town and countryside in the Transvaal* (Braamfontein, Ravan Press, 1983), p. 1.

46 F Khan, “Contemporary South African environmental response: A historical and socio-political evaluations with particular reference to blacks” (MA Thesis, UCT, 1990), p. 13.

47 See M Nash, *Black uprooting from white* (Braamfontein, South African Council of Churches, 1980); L Platzky & C Walker, *The surplus people: Forced removals in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985) and D Cosmas, *The discarded people: An account of Africa resettlement in South Africa* (London, Penguin African Library, 1971).

48 N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice...*, pp. 164-172.

### ***Impact of forced removals on political and environmental rights***

The residents of Ga-Rankuwa were denied rights to have access to sufficient food and water, infrastructure, employment, quality education, shelter, a healthcare system and a healthy environment. The South African Human Rights Commission on Economic and Social Rights argue that the present situation of poverty is a legacy of Apartheid policies that violated black people's rights to enjoy a better life.<sup>49</sup> Land alienation was used as an instrument in ensuring that the community of Ga-Rankuwa lacked political rights and environmental freedom. In terms of environmental freedom, the relocated were not allowed to achieve their human potential in relation to their environment. The consequences of displacement suffered by the African community of Lady Selborne were far reaching because their land ownership system generally prohibited alienation of the right to own land.<sup>50</sup> Land has been pivotal to the Sotho-Tswana and was regarded as *lefa* (inheritance). Interviews conducted in Ga-Rankuwa reflect this powerfully entrenched notion in which the land and the Sotho-Tswana are inextricably interlinked and in which human identity rests on the notion that without land a Mosotho/Motswana is not a "real person".<sup>51</sup> This explains why ideologically "nature" for the Sotho-Tswana is not an object for human exploitation but exists in a dialogue with humans.<sup>52</sup> This implies that the environment was perceived as part of humanity's source of existence and sustenance, and that environmental degradation is criminal. Despite the testimony of interviewees, historical analysis of the period from 1940 to 1960 indicates some level of environmental degradation in Lady Selborne. Overcrowding certainly contributed to the exhaustion of natural resources. For example, resorting to dung as a fuel source indicates some depletion of firewood. This is due to romanticism of the past by interviewees, which ignore the coexistence of capitalism along with traditional ideology. Hence Jacobs proposes that:<sup>53</sup>

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49 South African Human Rights Commission, *Economic & Social Rights SANGOCO's Report on Poverty and Human Rights*, Vol. V (Johannesburg, South African Human Rights Commission, 1999).

50 MLM Mbaio, "Undoing the injustices of the past...", *Journal for Judicial Science*, 27(2), 2002, p. 90.

51 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), Interview, I Mvula, 24 June 2004; R Kgari, 25 June 2004; J Motsheshane (Supervisor Cleaning Staff, George Mokhari Hospital, Ga-Rankuwa), 27 June 2004; W Kgari, 27 June 2004; T Tshweni, 28 June 2004; L Tshweni, (Assistant Mechanic, Nissan, Rosselline, Pretoria), 28 June 2004; Sekhu, 28 June 2004; V Maphalare, 28 June 2004; Maphalare, (Entrepreneur, Ga-Rankuwa), 28 June 2004; E Andrew, 28 June 2004; E Mohlahledi, 29 June 2004; P Matlaila, 29 June 2004; M Matlaila, 29 June 2004; M Madumo, 29 June 2004; M Manamela, 29 June, K, (Entrepreneur, Ga-Rankuwa), 29 June 2004; 1 July 2004.

52 GM Setiloane, *African theology: An introduction* (Johannesburg, Braamfontein, Skotaville Publishers, 1985) p. 40.

53 N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and justice...*, p. 217.



Environmental historians must account for the social dynamics that feed it, and they should consider social divisions in relations with the biophysical, but populism requires the same critical examination as given the official received wisdom, and we must maintain a critical distance from its values and proposals.

### ***Forced removals and resettlement: The start of a new life***

Lady Selborne's scenic beauty heightened its residents' sense of loss, as if the loss of property, identity, means of sustenance, neighbours, friends, family, soil and continuous history were not enough. The township had greenery, bush, river and fertile soils.<sup>54</sup> The residents were able to engage in food production through planting vegetables and fruit due to the fertility of the soil structure. According to interviewees they "could cultivate virtually anything on their land".<sup>55</sup> This implies that on the basis of the Sotho-Tswana custom the environment actively rendered the history of the community of Lady Selborne "alive". Thus John Illiffes' hypothesis that "the natural world offers a context in history not as a discrete historical actor" is dismissible in this context because the environment provided for the community of Lady Selborne in a dynamic way and they in turn preserved and cherished it.<sup>56</sup> Resettlement in Ga-Rankuwa meant the end of Lady Selborne's socio-environmental history for residents and the end of the semblance of environmental justice that the upper strata of landlords had enjoyed in their former township through ownership of private property. They had to start new lives, histories and friendships in Ga-Rankuwa, where environmental resources were poor.

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54 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), Interview, I Mvula, 24 June 2004; T Tshweni, 28 June 2004 and M Manamela, 29 June 2004.

55 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), Interview, I Mvula, 24 June 2004; R Kgari, 25 June 2004; J Motshetshane, 27 June 2004; W Kgari, 27 June 2004; T Tshweni, 28 June 2004; L Tshweni, 28 June 2004; Sekhu, 28 June 2004; V Maphalare, 28 June 2004; P Maphalare, 28 June 2004; E Andrew, 28 June 2004; E Mohlahledi, 29 June 2004; P Matlaila, 29 June 2004; M Matlaila, 29 June 2004; M Madumo, 29 June 2004; M Manamela, 29 June, K, 29 June 2004, 1 July 2004. MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), Interview, I Mvula, 24 June 2004; T Tshweni, 28 June 2004 and M Manamela, 29 June 2004.

56 JC McCann, *Green land, brown land black land: An environmental history of Africa 1800-1990* (Oxford, Heinemann Portsmouth, 1999), p. 47.

## **Environmental justice and history**

In recent years, South Africa's environmental justice movement through Earthlife Africa has gained momentum.<sup>57</sup> Jacobs' theory of environmental justice is instrumental due to her exploration of Tswana theories of environmental justice. She suggested a more equitable distribution of land and water resources, as well as the encouragement of small scale sustainable production in Kuruman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This article argues that to contribute to environmental justice the Sotho-Tswana theories of environmental conservation and their cultural matters need to be taken into consideration. As McDonald observes, "At its core, environmental justice is about incorporating environmental issues into the broader intellectual and institutional framework of human rights and democratic accountability".<sup>58</sup> Khan and others have argued that, until recently, environmentalism in South Africa has been tantamount to "a wildlife-centered, preservationist approach", which appealed chiefly to the financially comfortable and largely white minority, while alienating the majority of the country's blacks. In the last decade, however, environmentalists have accepted that appealing to all South Africans demands the redefinition of the environmental agenda to embrace fundamental needs, such as the right to a healthy environment.<sup>59</sup>

It is important to note in defining human rights that it is a complex and subjective concept. That it is difficult to translate into law hence this article's main focus to be on "Human Rights as human needs".<sup>60</sup> Craston defines such rights "as positive rights because they are recognised by positive law, the actual law of actual states".<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately black positive needs for secure settlement, freedom of movement, right to life, freedom of religion, belief and opinion and freedom of security were not regarded as rights by the law in South Africa and in Ga-Rankuwa under the Homeland of Bophuthatswana before 1994, but remained positive needs. The South African Human Rights Commission posits that "the apartheid Human Rights violation is currently manifested in the lack of access to productive land, homelessness and high levels of insecure

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57 See, for example, the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF), which defines itself as a service to network the South African non-governmental and community-based organizations on matters concerning environmental justice.

58 D McDonald (ed.), *Geography, the environment, and demography. Environmental justice in South Africa* (Athens, Ohio University Press/Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 2002), p. 3.

59 D McDonald ed., *Geography, the environment, and demography...* p. 28.

60 M Seleokane, *Socio-economic rights in the South African constitution: Theory and practice* (Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 2001), p. 20.

61 M Seleokane, *Socio-economic rights in the South African constitution...*, p. 8.

tenure”.<sup>62</sup> Laws like the Land Act of 1913 and 1936, the Native Trust Act and the Group Areas Act of 1950 and 1956 restricted residence and movement of races. Black and white freedoms however were curtailed, disproportionately and unfairly.

It is vital for restoration and resettlement to occur for environmental justice to exist for those who were displaced. Such restoration also involves the recognition of their ethics of land use. According to the Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), forced removals effected without negotiations with the residents on resettlement or removal constitute a violation of human rights.<sup>63</sup> On the same note, using the stipulations of COHRE, this case study of Lady Selborne rarely encountered international standards required by human rights law or even basic notions of human dignity.<sup>64</sup>

According to Glazewski, “environmental justice broadly exhorts that nature’s environmental gift, should be distributed equally and certain groups of society should not bear an unequal brunt of negative environmental impacts”.<sup>65</sup> The case study of Lady Selborne and Ga-Rankuwa has shown that various black groups were burdened with environmentally poor areas while their white counterparts were able to appropriate Lady Selborne that was environmentally superior. For socio-environmental justice to be realised there must be equilibrium between environmental rights and economic improvement.<sup>66</sup> The former residents of Lady Selborne suffered environmental injustice when the area was appropriated by the State. Levin, Solomon and Weiner assert that “apartheid alienation of the soil and water resources was central” during the pre-1994 period<sup>67</sup> because blacks found that “land was vital, no life was possible without the land, everything was from land”.<sup>68</sup> This article largely concurs with the conventional understanding of forced removals, captured in Oosthuizen and Molokoe’s conceptualisation:<sup>69</sup>

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62 South African Human Rights Commission, *3<sup>rd</sup> Economic & Social Rights Report 1999/2000*, p. 278.

63 Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), *Forced evictions: Violations of human rights* (Geneva, Switzerland, COHRE, 2003).

64 COHRE, *Forced evictions...*, p. 13.

65 Cited in South African Human Rights Commission, *4<sup>th</sup> Economic & Social Rights Report 2000/2002*, (2003), p. 321.

66 South African Human Rights Commission, *4<sup>th</sup> Economic & Social Rights Report...*, p. 323.

67 R Levin et al., “Forced removals and land claims”, R Levin & D Weiner (eds.), *No more tears: Struggles for land in Mpumalanga, South Africa* (Eritrea, Africa World Press, 1997), p. 100.

68 R Levin et al., “Forced removals...”, R Levin & D Weiner (eds.), *No more tears...*, p. 9.

69 G Oosthuizen & B Molokoe, “The Bakwena ba Mogopa: Victims of forced removals, 1983-1984”, *Historia*, 45(1), 2000, p. 345.

Forced removals can be defined as a process of control, division and segregation of people. It is achieved by forcing people to move from one place of residence to another without their opinion and/or approval. In South Africa forced removals were carried out to implement the apartheid policy, which was aimed at segregated development in separated geographical, political and economic terms.

This definition, however, neglects the psychological and environmental changes caused by forced removals. Van Eeden argues “the ‘removal’ or “transference” of the psyche or mind to think about change, no matter if it is economic or political must be considered in the process of identifying aspects relating to removal”.<sup>70</sup> She elaborates by stating that the underlying motives of forced removals such as “language, race, class, gender, labour, social destruction, disease, poverty and war” have to be considered when analysing them.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the policy of forced removals divided families, tampered with gender roles, exacerbated poverty and interfered with the environment and people’s relationship therewith.

Due to the ramifications of land dispossession most of Lady Selborne’s former landlords became tenants in Ga-Rankuwa because they did not receive compensation for their former homes. Most interviewees who were tenants in Lady Selborne maintained that they were happy to move to Ga-Rankuwa and felt that their humanness was actually affirmed by the resettlement.<sup>72</sup> Having a roof over their heads, even though they had to pay rent, meant that they were *batho*. Most former landlords, however, felt that “through removals their humanness was destroyed”.<sup>73</sup> This indicates that class stratification re-emerged in a different form in Ga-Rankuwa. There was not only a class fissure running through the different experience of forced removals, but also a gendered dimension. The poor soil quality and water shortages were the norm which hit women particularly hard as they were the food producers and improving the soil was difficult due to poverty.<sup>74</sup> Even creative measures such as using food peels to fertilise the soil normally ended in failure.<sup>75</sup> Food production plummeted and poverty skyrocketed, and its inhabitants thus named it Ga-

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70 ES Van Eeden, “Forced removals in its many colours: A comparative study of selected examples worldwide”, The South African Historical Society Conference, (1997), p. 4.

71 ES Van Eeden, “Forced removals in its many colours...”, pp. 5-7.

72 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), Interview, I Mvula, 24 June 2004; R Kgari, 25 June 2004; E Mohlahledi, 29 June 2004; M Matlaila, 29 June 2004; P Matlaila, 29 June 2004 and M Madumo, 29 June 2004.

73 Interview, MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), J Motshetshane, 27 June 2004; T Tshweni, 28 June 2004; L Tshweni, 28 June 2004; P Maphalare, 28 June 2004; E Andrew, 28 June 2004; M Manamela, 29 June 2004.

74 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), Interview, R Kgari, 25 June 2004 and Sekhu, 28 June 2004.

75 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), Interview, R Kgari, 25 June 2004 and V Maphalare, 28 June 2004.

Rankuwa in this instance it meant: “we are not welcomed by the soil”. Despite this, both former tenants and landlords had some sense of loss of identity due to removals, whether of land, friends, family or material possessions. The worst scenario was the loss of fertile soil and therefore the chance to engage in food production, which combined with the loss of infrastructure.<sup>76</sup>

The interviewees, especially former landlords of Lady Selborne who could not purchase plots in the relocation area, describe the “loss of will to live”, which explains the loss of interest in environmental issues.<sup>77</sup> This led to people like Musi saying:<sup>78</sup>

Here’s the country’s economy in a mess and all that can be done is to collect *maphhepha* (papers) to preserve an animal that to me is as useless as the dinosaur.

Socio-environmental injustice is also evident in the fact that black people depended highly on the white-controlled economy, which is an indicator of a collective subordination to another race.<sup>79</sup> Some men in Ga-Rankuwa, as in other resettlement areas, were forced to engage in the migrant labour system since poverty was rife, which was the rationale of the National party government under President Verwoerd— and thus many children grew up without a father, which caused many generational schisms.<sup>80</sup> The Churches’ Report on Forced removals in South Africa asserts that forced removals had no respect for the delicacy of family structures.<sup>81</sup> Women were burdened with many responsibilities and some families disintegrated. Male dignity was degraded as men were treated as boys by whites in the job market in the cities and mines. Their masculinity in Ga-Rankuwa generally remained intact as males continued to play major roles in their homes and communities as ritual priests. The humiliation they suffered further harmed their self-esteem. Moller argues that such men, regardless of actual marital status, were typically treated as single,<sup>82</sup> hence Shillington calls their wages “bachelor wages” which could not assist families in developing their immediate environment and this was also the case in Ga-Rankuwa.<sup>83</sup>

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76 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), Interview, T Tshweni, 28 June 2004.

77 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), Interview, T Tshweni, 28 June 2004 and L Tshweni, 28 June 2004.

78 O Musi, “Black view point”, *Cape Argus*, 14 November 1989, p. 6.

79 N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice...*, p. 220.

80 K Shillington, *History of Southern Africa* (London, Longman, 1990), p. 161.

81 *Relocations: The churches’ report on forced removals in South Africa* (Randburg, South African Council of Churches and the South African Catholic Bishops Conference, 1984), p. 31.

82 V Moller, “Change in South African labour”, H Giliomee & L Schemmer (ed.), *Up against the fences: Poverty, passes and privilege in South Africa* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1985), p. 28.

83 K Shillington, *History of Southern Africa...*, p. 161.

Land loss and its concomitant effect on self-esteem led the Sotho-Tswana of Ga-Rankuwa to become apathetic towards environmental issues.<sup>84</sup> The community's greater political and socio-economic challenges they faced also contributed to their negative engagement with their new environment. Evidence of environmental degradation is written in the landscape of the area: litter, dongas, soil erosion and little greenery.<sup>85</sup> It reveals that "Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument".<sup>86</sup> It shows that, though Ga-Rankuwa was termed an independent area under Bophuthatswana in 1977, the National Party government had already ruined the residents psychologically by displacing them to an infertile area and by failing to develop it after 1961. From the research undertaken Mangope did little to assist in developing the soils in the area of Ga-Rankuwa since it was a location. An interviewee T Tshweni argued that there were restrictions placed on the utilisation of water which further hampered the improvement of the soil.

Many black people adhere to Musi's environmental beliefs but that does not mean they oppose environmental conservation. While pre-colonial blacks "lived in close contact with the environment and regarded themselves as part of the environment, not separate from it", the National Party government prioritised traditional conservation over black needs.<sup>87</sup> This study suggests that black poverty could be seen to have led to a black withdrawal from environmental issues in the face of pragmatic need. Hoffman and Ashwell support this when they argue that black environmental antagonism stems from the "insensitivity to the prevailing socio-economic conditions and cultural practices by the apartheid government".<sup>88</sup> For environmental justice to be realised policy makers should not ignore the "usable past" from the previously disadvantaged cultures.

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84 F Khan, "Contemporary South African environmental response: An historical and socio-political evaluations with particular reference to blacks" (MA, UCT, 1990), p. 1.

85 Observed during fieldwork in Ga-Rankuwa, 2004.

86 CS Lewis, *The abolition of ban: Reflections on education with special reference to the teaching of English in the upper forms of schools* (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1946), p. 40.

87 Ngubane cited in F Khan, "Contemporary South African environmental response: An historical and socio-political evaluations with particular reference to blacks" (MA, UCT, 1990), p. 15.

88 T Hoffman & A Ashwell, *Nature divided: Land degradation in South Africa* (Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 2001), p. 32.



## **A usable past? Steps towards environmental activism in Ga-Rankuwa**

Can an understanding of history be deployed to encourage environmental activism among blacks in resettlement areas such as Ga-Rankuwa? Mamdani has observed that the colonial institutions of Indirect Rule in the countryside have not been democratised in much of independent Africa, and customary African structures have not been opened to community participation.<sup>89</sup> The State still has to ensure that African leadership structures are recognised and involve participation of the community and not ignore their cultural historical facet as it is a crucial “usable past” that entails the traditional African customs and beliefs in attaining socio-environmental justice for the public. Jacobs proposes that even though the national constitution can be progressive there must be open participation in democratic decisions in South Africa or communities will be faced with unfair state intervention again.<sup>90</sup> Black Africans in South Africa including Homelands (before they achieved their independent status) were not involved in formulating the policies that governed them but were compelled to obey such laws, hence the environmental problems in the formerly-black areas. This implies that South Africans need to build not only new societal relationships but also new relationships with their environment.<sup>91</sup> The issue of forced removals remains controversial in South Africa and raises questions that require profound resolutions to ensure that the communities affected are left satisfied and participate in the development of their areas.<sup>92</sup> As this study has shown, the pernicious legacy of forced removals still resonates in those displaced from Lady Selborne and these perceptions resulted in the degradation of the resettlement areas’ environment. Some residents adopted passive resistance, characterised by non-participation in environmental issues, because they felt aggrieved by displacement. Thus there should be different steps that the state, residents, educational institutions, businesses and non-governmental institutions undertake to ensure that residents of Ga-Rankuwa find fulfilment in the area and establish it as a “home”. This study proposes that the relocated community of Ga-Rankuwa needs to participate through decision construction in the political, social, economic and environmental making of their location to achieve this.

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89 M Mamdani, *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996), pp 24-25, 288–289.

90 N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice...*, p. 221.

91 S Horstmeier & S Cornelissen, “The social and political construction of identities...”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40(1), 2002, p. 56.

92 MLM Mbao, “Undoing the injustices of the past...”, *Journal for Judicial Science*, 27(2), 2002, p. 91.

This study argues that environmental scholars have dealt with the issue of environmental activism but not within a historical context.<sup>93</sup> The key to inculcating environmental activism has been through education programmes and the eradication of the legacy of Apartheid. The drawback of such proposals is that they fail to consider that for blacks to participate in environmental issues, their perception of themselves must be transformed through land redistribution, and environmental policies, which should balance traditional and western science methods and theories via a new paradigm that allows discussion between these two discourses. Practical views relevant to the South African context should be adopted, and should accommodate traditional laws on land and land use. Although this article has tried to fill the lacuna, still more research on changing black perceptions of the environment or the causes thereof is necessary. It is important to deal with education from within indigenous cultures and using indigenous environmental beliefs and laws within the frame-work of the modern democratic constitution, in order to rehabilitate black environmental activism through negotiation with western science environmental activism.

The different meanings people attach to land and the relationship of land rights to power and wealth are helpfully delineated by case-studies such as the Ga-Rankuwa situation. Such case-studies could be incorporated into secondary school history syllabi. Students would analyse community and government responses to environmental injustices, and critically assess strategies to promote more ecologically sound and socially just practices. Students should be offered education that includes a usable past of traditional African customs and beliefs that enables them to confront the propagandistic messages of power elites and to continue the project of progressive social transformation and liberation entailed in the New South African constitution.

All interviewees expressed concern for their areas, which is a vital step towards environmental activism. One interviewee, for example, proposed a practical measure that was used by Lady Selborne's Sotho-Tswana: local government should oblige people to look after their environment, as was previously practised by pre-colonial chiefs and their helpers (*dikgosana*).<sup>94</sup> Local residents should work with the state, education institutions and Non-Governmental Organisations to rebuild their environments. According to

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93 F Khan, "Contemporary South African environmental response: An historical and socio-political evaluations with particular reference to blacks" (MA, UCT, 1990).

94 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), Interview, E Andrew, 28 June 2004.

Setiloane, the idiom *motho ke motho ka batho babang* explains that a person becomes a real human being through participation, and thus residents would affirm their humanness through environmental activism.<sup>95</sup> A strategy of combating environmental apathy could be initiated through allowing residents to have ownership of land in their former township as suggested by the land redistribution and land restitution policy. Many of those interviewed did not want their former lands restored but opted for compensation and to remain in the resettlement area, while other members of the community of Ga-Rankuwa felt that they want to be restored to Suiderberg - new name for Lady Selborne.<sup>96</sup> This is clearly stipulated in a Setswana proverb, “Maroping goa boelwa go saboelweng ke maleng”, which means people should not be afraid to return to the places where life was enjoyable if they are not fulfilled in their new areas.<sup>97</sup> Hence Seremane argues that “it is in these terms that we should understand land reform, as a return to the land and, to people’s beginnings”.<sup>98</sup> This does not only imply a physical return to the former land but it also encourages those who applied for compensation and former tenants to use psychological restoration for healing and in the process activism will be cultivated. This implies that, through land redistribution and restitution, people’s self-worth could be restored and in the process social restoration programmes such as environmental awareness could be spread among communities. Restoration requires the collaboration of local communities, state, schools, tertiary institutions and non-governmental organisations. Seremane argues that, “these women and men clearly show us that when the poor begin to help themselves, they deserve a helping hand”.<sup>99</sup>

Traditional ethics need to be considered in environmental policy considerations, as stated above. The involvement and co-operation of the community and the government is crucial in ensuring environmental rehabilitation in the resettlement areas. The end of apartheid and its concomitant negative stereotypes that undermine African cultural and traditional practices will assist in the improvement in the quality of life in some of the former black areas where litter is everywhere and can assist in them prioritising the issues of the environment.<sup>100</sup> This clearly relates to

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95 GM Setiloane, *African theology*, p. 14.

96 MLM Mbaob, “Undoing the injustices of the past...”, *Journal for Judicial Science*, 27(2), 2002, p. 108.

97 MOM Seboni, *Diane le Maele a Setswana* (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1980), p. 119.

98 W Seremane, “Land – the cradle of the people”, M Winberg ed., *Voices from the land: Experiences of land reform in South Africa* (South Africa, Western Cape, Juta, 1998), p. 6.

99 W Seremane, “Land...”, M Winberg (ed.), *Voices from the land...*, p. 6.

100 F Khan, “Contemporary South African environmental response: An historical and socio-political evaluations with particular reference to blacks” (MA, UCT, 1990), p. 11.

current trends in formerly-black areas, but the hastening of the process of land restitution and the engagement of indigenous land use and land rights laws with western laws must be prioritised in order to restore a sense of humanness among the people of South Africa.

The state should assist the residents of Ga-Rankuwa with the process of land restitution and provide compensation for the loss of their former homes in order for them to make a “home” there. Though land restitution implies that “they should be restored to their land and provided with other remedies as people who were dispossessed by racially discriminatory laws and practices”,<sup>101</sup> this is complicated as it is not easy or necessarily germane to expropriate land from the current landowners in Suiderberg. It is also difficult as street names, buildings and the general environment in former Lady Selborne have been changed. A renewal of the Ga-Rankuwa residents’ ‘pursuit for a home’ in Ga-Rankuwa is thus necessary, and requires that they contribute economically to their new area by buying fertilizers to improve their soil and planting trees to decrease soil erosion. It also requires the state to support the resettlement area financially in achieving environmental development.

The concept of *ubuntu* or *botho* suggests that participation is key in creating a “home” in Ga-Rankuwa, which implies that the residents must take the lead and ensure development of their immediate surroundings by creating employment, caring for and cleaning their immediate environments. Business men and women should be encouraged to create industries in the area. Cernea maintains that the major problem arises due to unemployment in the relocation area as it makes the unemployed develop a sense of hopelessness and helplessness, which is translated into many activities in which they engage.<sup>102</sup> Maré argues that South Africa’s history of displacement entailed economic, political and ideological processes that have led to social (and, as this article has shown, environmental) ennui.<sup>103</sup> The findings of this article concurs with Khan that removals made blacks apathetic to environmental issues, and that discrimination must be totally eradicated in all spheres for them to become actively involved in rehabilitating their environment.<sup>104</sup> This also means eradication of environmental policy discrimination whereby Africans’ cultural

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101 MLM Mbaob, “Undoing the injustices of the past...”, *Journal for Judicial Science*, 27(2), 2002, p. 94.

102 MM Cernea, *The urban environment and population relocation* (Washington, The World Bank, 1993), p. 28.

103 G Maré, “Processes, policies and African population relocation”, D Thomas (ed.), “*Resettlement*”: *Papers given at the 51<sup>st</sup> annual council meeting* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1981), p. 1.

104 F Khan, “Contemporary South African environmental response: An historical and socio-political evaluations with particular reference to blacks” (MA, UCT, 1990), p. 1.

and traditional beliefs are not adhered to but the western scientific ideologies are considered as norms for conservation. According to Tulleken, the state is trying to improve the environment by awarding Townships Awards such as the “cleanest town” – a good step in encouraging activism but it has to be combined with community awareness through paid officials.<sup>105</sup> Adding tangible benefits to these awards would stimulate this process. Facilities need to be speedily improved, as does service delivery, to achieve environmental upliftment in formerly-black areas. Returning to Lady Selborne could thus assist those who opt for restitution as they would win a measure of consolation and in the process they will have ownership of the area and actively engage harmoniously with their environment.

However, it is important to note that all the former landlords interviewed maintained that they do not want to return to their former township. This is an important consideration as this shows that they are indeed trying to make the resettlement area a “home”. They have invested in Ga-Rankuwa and part of their history is embedded in the township. They do not want the rupture of their history they had in the former township to reoccur. These residents have accepted the theory of a “movable home” as compared to a set idea of a “home” that they had when they arrived in the relocation area.<sup>106</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Segregationist policies and forced removals in the early 1960s led to widespread environmental damage in addition to changing the lives of many black people such as those displaced from Lady Selborne and relocated in Ga-Rankuwa. and-related Acts led to displacements and exposed blacks to a vicious cycle of poverty and destruction of cultural and economic systems. These Acts also undermined the blacks’ past (pre-colonial) cultural and traditional customs, self-esteem and concern for the environment. Environmental degradation thus became prevalent in resettlement areas like Ga-Rankuwa. Some residents subsequently became apathetic or even antagonistic towards the environment, in stark contrast to the reverence they had previously felt in their former settlements as in the case of Lady Selborne. The slow rate of service delivery in formerly-black areas has not helped reverse this anti-environmental stance, and the government must develop such areas while providing environmental

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105 L Tulleken, “Environment and tourism: Cleanest Town”, *Cape Argus*, 24 November 2005, p. 24.

106 N Rapport and J Overing, *Social and cultural anthropology* (London, Routledge: 2000), p. 158.

education, involving business and the community. It is important that the community of Ga-Rankuwa try to involve itself in its rehabilitation through employing the principles of the usable past of their customs and traditions, despite the long-term ramifications of forced removals. As Timberlake has argued that “it is the African peasant who best understands how and why he/she has been forced to damage the environment on which they depend and it is he or she who is the key to rebuilding their continent”.<sup>107</sup> The residents of Ga-Rankuwa should thus remember the saying: “Shuping goa boelwa gosa boelweng ke maleng”.<sup>108</sup> Using their past experiences of environmental upliftment that they enjoyed in Lady Selborne would indeed be a step towards environmental activism.

Research, participation, land redistribution and restitution are thus integral parts of a democratic resolution of the land question and crucial to restoring environmental equality or empowerment. Further participatory research on socio-environmental history of forced removals would, however, need to move beyond identification of removals and their impact. It should begin to focus more specifically on the role of organisations in reversing environmental degradation and, where appropriate, formulate alternative policies to be followed, which include both traditional cultural and religious perceptions of the land and western scientific environmental ideals. This study demonstrated that policies established during the segregationist period failed dismally in inculcating the African usable past traditional environmental conservation and preservation ideals on the environment – and instead led to environmental injustice and apathy. Future research could use other case-studies such as District Six and Langa in Cape Town to compare micro-environments, establishing a comparative base to explore ideas delineated in this article.

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107 L Timberlake, *Africa in crisis: The causes, the curses of environmental bankruptcy* (London, Earthscan Publications, 1985), p. 195.

108 “Where life was enjoyable, one can return”.