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Ekhayeni: Rural–Urban Migration, Belonging and Landscapes of Home in South Africa

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South Africa continues to experience high rates of rural–urban migration. Despite long-term residence in urban areas, many migrants do not consider the city to be home. This article presents a multi-sited study of Xhosa-speaking migrants who journey between Centane in the former Transkei homeland and Cape Town. The study aimed to explore the relationship that migrants have with their family home (ekhayeni). We interpret migrants’ narratives of life in the city and returning home in terms of processes of ‘place attachment’ (sensory, narrative, historical, spiritual, ideological, commodifying and material dependence) and factors that influence ‘place belonging’ (autobiographical, relational, cultural, economic and legal). We found that the landscape of home remains central to migrants’ cultural identity, belonging and well-being. Childhood experiences in nature and activities that continue to take rural inhabitants into these landscapes remain key to this relationship. Our case material contributes to understanding people’s motivation for ongoing visits to and investment in the rural areas, notably the emotional and spiritual dimensions of home and belonging, and the sensory and spiritual attachment to the natural environment. This complements and extends other recent work on rural–urban migration, which has focused on the rural areas as sites of asserting citizenship, social change and changing forms of investment that are to a large extent driven by the lack of opportunity to do so meaningfully in the informal settlements migrants inhabit in the city.

Keywords: belonging; home; homelands; place attachment; rural–urban migration

Introduction

Circular labour migration was an ingrained and deliberate feature of colonial and apartheid-era South Africa that ensured a pool of cheap labour to serve dominant white interests, particularly the mining industry. Apart from the social effects caused by the break-up of

families and households, the rise of labour migration contributed to the demise of black smallholder agriculture.¹

After the end of the apartheid regime in 1994, many believed that circular labour migration would cease or diminish in the absence of institutional enforcement.² Access to title deeds and land tenure in urban centres meant that African people were no longer compelled to retain a rural base, and the possibility to live as a family was further supported through the provision of government RDP houses.³ The opening up of these possibilities was portrayed as weakening urban–rural links, causing some to anticipate that families that prospered financially would choose to settle permanently in the cities.⁴ Equally, investment in rural land reform and economic development (including agriculture, mining and tourism) were expected to provide economic opportunities that would reduce the need for labour migration and allow people to live in rural areas full-time.

Contrary to these expectations, a large number of people, particularly young men and women, have continued to leave the rural areas of South Africa in search of work in urban areas in the last two decades,⁵ but the majority consider themselves to be members of rural households and many intend to return to the rural areas later in life.⁶ Circular migration, which spans a continuum from brief temporary work contracts in cities to an extended urban residence followed by eventual retirement at home, thus remains prevalent in South Africa long after institutional controls enforcing it have fallen away. Several decades of research in sub-Saharan Africa have shown that circular migration between rural and urban areas, and the maintenance of rural–urban linkages, has retained its importance and vitality in the post-colonial (and post-apartheid) era for a number of economic, socio-cultural and political reasons.⁷ These include spreading economic risk, combining rural and urban income streams, maintaining family and kinship ties, attachment to land and a rural way of life, and the desire to be buried in one’s place of birth. The expectation that permanent migration into cities inevitably replaces circular migration is rooted in a meta-narrative of modernisation and unilinear urban transition which has been widely criticised as inadequate in describing the migrant experiences in sub-Saharan Africa generally and Southern Africa more specifically.⁸ Historical perspectives have shown that mobility, including different forms of migration, is deeply

1 C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London, Heinemann, 1979).

2 P. Kok, M. O’Donovan, O. Bouare, J. van Zyl, *Post-Apartheid Patterns of Internal Migration in South Africa* (Cape Town, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press, 2003); D. Posel, ‘Have Migration Patterns in Post-Apartheid South Africa Changed?’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics*, 15 (2004), pp. 277–92.

3 The South African government provided these small, low-cost houses under the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which it initiated soon after the first democratic elections in 1994. See L. Bank, ‘Living Together, Moving Apart: Home-Made Agendas, Identity Politics and Urban–Rural Linkages in the Eastern Cape, South Africa’, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 19, 1 (2001), pp. 129–47.

4 M.A. Collinson, S.M. Tollman, K. Kahn, S.J. Clark and M. Garenne, ‘Highly Prevalent Circular Migration: Households, Mobility and Economic Status in Rural South Africa’, *Africa on the Move: African Migration and Urbanisation in Comparative Perspective* (Pretoria, Statistics South Africa, 2006), pp. 194–216.

5 D. Potts, ‘Circular Migration in Zimbabwe and Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa’ (Woodbridge, James Currey, 2010); L. Bank, ‘City Slums, Rural Homesteads: Migrant Culture, Displaced Urbanism and the Citizenship of the Serviced House’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 5 (2015), pp. 1067–81.

6 D. Posel and C. Marx, ‘Circular Migration: A View from Destination Households in Two Urban Informal Settlements in South Africa’, *Journal of Development Studies*, 49, 6 (2013), pp. 819–31.

7 Reviewed in Potts, ‘Circular Migration in Zimbabwe and Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa’ and B. Lohnert and M. Steinbrink, ‘Rural and Urban Livelihoods: A Translocal Perspective in a South African Context’, *South African Geographical Journal*, 87, 2 (2005), pp. 95–103.

8 *Ibid.*; J. Ferguson, ‘Modern Workers, Modernist Narratives: A Critique of the Historiography of Transition on the Zambian Copperbelt’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, 3 (1990), pp. 385–412 (Part One) and 14, 4 (1990), pp. 603–21 (Part Two).

embedded within societies across Africa.⁹ It is important, however, to recognise the structural reasons that drive ongoing circular migration, such as landlessness in rural areas and low wages and lack of social security in urban areas. Acutely aware of these structural issues, Ferguson¹⁰ argued that rural–urban circular migration remains as a form of resistance to the ‘brutalities of global capitalism’, although his research saw the return to the rural areas as often reluctant and humiliating, forced upon workers by the ‘desperate conditions of the urban economy’.¹¹

In South Africa, the rural home still provides a form of ‘insurance’ for work seekers through familiar and kinship ties, as the risks attached to a city’s labour market have remained high because of poor job security, high unemployment and the rising cost of living in urban areas. Rather than being discrete economic systems, urban and rural are better understood as sub-systems of a spatially diversified translocal system,¹² in which households engage in a combination of diverse economic strategies in different locations. Even migrants who have settled in the city with their families for long periods of their working life continue to contribute to family occasions and return home for family emergencies and funerals of loved ones and relatives.¹³ In some cases, the rural areas are perceived as a place for young children to be cared for while working age men and women seek jobs in the urban centres.¹⁴ Commitment to rural homes has also been examined in relation to the rural area as a refuge and offering care for people infected with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.¹⁵

Beyond practical and economic reasons, the attachments to home and rural identity remain current as the majority of contemporary migrants continue to perceive urban areas as a temporary space for work and economic gain, while the rural area remains *ekhayeni* – ‘home’.¹⁶ For example, many Xhosa-speaking people refer to their rural home as their *umnombo* (literally, the wick of a paraffin lamp, referring to the way one’s rural home ‘fuels’ a person’s ‘flame’) or *inkaba* (the umbilical cord), which is buried at home after birth and signifies a person’s physical and emotional connection with their rural home.¹⁷ Maintaining family and social relationships in rural areas is reflected in ongoing investment in cattle and ‘building the homestead’ by long-term residents and migrant workers.¹⁸

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- 9 A. Adepoju, ‘The Context of Migration from a Continental and Regional Perspective’, in P. Kok, D. Gelderblom, J.O. Ouchou and J. van Zyl (eds), *Migration in South and Southern Africa: Dynamics and Determinants* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2006).
- 10 J. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Copperbelt* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London; University of California Press, 1999), p. 257.
- 11 Ferguson, ‘Modern Workers, Modernist Narratives’, Part Two, p. 611.
- 12 Lohnert and Steinbrink ‘Rural and Urban Livelihoods’.
- 13 J. Gugler, ‘The Son of the Hawk does not Remain Abroad: The Urban–Rural Connection in Africa’, *African Studies Review*, 45, 1 (2002), pp. 21–41.
- 14 Posel, ‘Migration Patterns in Post-Apartheid South Africa’.
- 15 S. J. Clark, M.A. Collinson, K. Kahn, K. Drullinger and S. Tollman, ‘Returning Home to Die: Circular Labour Migration and Mortality in South Africa’, *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 35, 69 (2007) pp. 35–44; M. Coffee, M.N. Lurie and G.P. Garnett, ‘Modelling the Impact of Migration on the HIV Epidemic in South Africa’, *AIDS*, 21, 3 (2007) pp. 343–50.
- 16 C. Manona, ‘Deagrarianization and the Urbanization of a Rural Economy: Agrarian Patterns in Melani Village in the Eastern Cape, South Africa’, *Grahamstown: Institute of Social and Economic Research and Leiden* (African Studies Centre, Working Paper 32, 1999); D. Posel, ‘How do Households Work? Migration, the Household and Remittance Behaviour in South Africa’, *Social Dynamics*, 27, 1 (2001), pp. 165–89; Gugler, ‘The Son of the Hawk does not Remain Abroad’; V.A. Masterson, M. Tengö and M. Spierenburg, ‘Competing Place Meanings in Complex Landscapes: A Social–Ecological Approach to Unpacking Community Conservation Outcomes on the Wild Coast, South Africa’, *Society & Natural Resources*, 30, 12 (2017), pp. 1442–57.
- 17 T. Kepe, R. Hall and B. Cousins, ‘Land’, in N. Sheppard and S. Robins (eds), *The New South African Key Words* (Johannesburg, Jacana Media, and Athens, Ohio University Press, 2008).
- 18 A. Ainslie, ‘Farming Cattle, Cultivating Relationships: Cattle Ownership and Cultural Politics in Peddie District, Eastern Cape’, *Social Dynamics*, 31, 1 (2005), pp. 129–56; Bank, ‘City Slums, Rural Homesteads’, pp. 1067–81.

Although the city is seen as providing better economic and educational opportunities, many migrants are concerned about their 'culture' being broken down while in the city.¹⁹ Among migrants to Durban whose stated intention was to remain in the city for the rest of their lives, the vast majority nevertheless considered themselves to be members of rural households.²⁰ While the ability to visit 'home' is often limited by financial constraints or work commitments, the availability of mobile telephones has made keeping contact easier. Circular migrants in informal settlements in Cape Town reported phoning household members in their home village in the former Transkei on average six times a month.²¹ Thus, economic and socio-cultural attachment to rural areas of home does not require, or presuppose, actual or intended return migration.

The changing nature of labour migration between the Transkei coast and Cape Town informal settlements has been recently described in depth by Leslie Bank.²² He highlights the shift towards more family-centred cooperation among migrants, an increase in younger and female migrants, and changes in rural investment from arable pursuits to building homesteads, often incorporating modern buildings that signify success in the city. The recurring theme of responsibility and respect (self-respect, respect for one's parents and ancestors, and respect of other residents for returning migrants who invest in their rural homesteads) is notable in the accounts he presents. The investment in rural homes and regular return (though usually for short periods only) is interpreted by Bank as 'rural anchoring' 'displaced urbanism' and 'symbolic migration' – a 'hidden frontier of social change' where urban aspirations and assertion of citizenship are often frustrated in the urban space and, largely by necessity, lived out and displayed in the rural setting.

In this article, we present a multi-sited case study of circular migrants who journey from the Centane region on the former Transkei to the informal settlements of Khayelitsha and Philippi in Cape Town. We aimed to understand how geographical localities of birth and childhood are ascribed meaning through social, religious and cultural ties, which in turn evoke notions of origin and belonging and tie people to a particular place. In trying to achieve this, concepts such as place attachment²³ and belonging²⁴ were used to analyse how the social and the physical environment of rural place provides a significant locus of sentiment and meaning for self and identity. Specifically, through interviews and participant observation, we²⁵ sought to understand what continues to motivate migrants to move to the city and to return home, how mobility affects the attachments to the home place, what features of the rural landscape migrants attach meaning to and how the rural home supports elements of migrants' individual and group identity. Our focus was explicitly on the non-economic aspects of rural–urban linkages and attachments with an emphasis on non-commodified aspects of life such as culture, family and nature. We also explored whether processes that maintain and affirm autochthony, emplacement and belonging provided ways (in addition to the more well-documented socio-economic ones) of providing security and well-being and thus coping with the harsh realities imposed by neoliberal capitalism. We specifically focus on experiential autochthony, i.e. having a sense of belonging to a place of

19 Posel, 'Migration Patterns in Post-Apartheid South Africa'.

20 Posel and Marx, 'Circular Migration: A View from Destination Households'.

21 Lohnert and Steinbrink 'Rural and Urban Livelihoods', p. 99.

22 Bank, 'City Slums, Rural Homesteads'.

23 J.E. Cross, 'Processes of Place Attachment: An Interactional Framework', *Symbolic Interaction*, 38, 4 (2015) pp. 493–520.

24 M. Antonsich, 'Searching for Belonging – An Analytical Framework', *Geography Compass*, 4, 6 (2010), pp. 644–59.

25 The fieldwork was conducted by the first author, Avela Njwambe, as part of her research for a master's degree. See A. Njwambe, 'Essence of Home: Relevance of Home and the Assertion of Place amongst Centane Migrants, South Africa' (MA thesis, Department of Anthropology, Rhodes University, 2016). Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10962/51866>, retrieved 5 June 2019.

‘home’ that is generated by ‘day-to-day processes of emplacement within both the physical and social environments through which individuals develop a sense of belonging to their homeland’.²⁶

The findings of our research echo many of these themes revealed by Bank’s²⁷ study, notably the ‘push’ factor of alienating and unsatisfactory living conditions in the informal settlements in the city, the importance of respecting family and ancestors in the rural home, and the desire to be respected for success in the city and for maintaining tradition and providing economically in the rural home. However, our case study contributes an additional and complementary layer to understanding people’s motivation for maintaining rural ties and visiting rural homes, which has been less well documented in the context of rural–urban migration. This is the strength and prevalence of a sense of home and belonging, or experiential autochthony, commonly linked to the experience of being in the agricultural and natural landscapes of home that are closely tied to individual and collective memory, identity and culture. Our work also highlights the importance people attribute to the mentally, spiritually and physically restorative effects of the return home and interacting with family, social networks and the natural landscape.

It is likely that the differences in our findings from those of Bank (whose respondents hail from an area not far from Centane and who also work in Cape Town) reflect differences in research emphasis and focus, and possibly the identity of the researchers, rather than on the respondents’ different experiences. We aimed our research explicitly to explore migrants’ personal meanings of ‘home’, and how this related to their motivations for, and experiences of, returning home. Internationally, studies on migration have alluded to the significance that locations of birth and childhood have on evoking notions of belonging, purpose and meaning,²⁸ but few studies in a Southern African context have attempted to explore migrants’ relationships with rural areas as a place of home, which ties people to a particular place.²⁹ The relationships between home and landscape, including the natural environment, have also been little explored in this context. Our previous research has shown that eliciting people’s sentiments, attachments and connections to the natural environment was often difficult, as people did not often consciously reflect on them, but that once appropriate questions were asked, the narratives of people’s attachment to nature, both at a personal level and as mediated by cultural and subsistence practices, proved remarkably similar.³⁰ It is also possible that the identity of the field researcher as a young, black, Xhosa-speaking woman influenced the types of narratives respondents, particularly younger men and women, were prepared to share. We return to this in the conclusion.

26 C. Gressier, *At Home in the Okavango* (New York and Oxford, Berghahn, 2015), p. 6.

27 Bank, ‘Urban Slums, Rural Homesteads’; similar themes also emerge in Lohnert and Steinbrink, ‘Rural and Urban Livelihoods’.

28 For example, H.M. Proshansky, A.K. Fabian and R. Kaminoff, ‘Place-Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self’, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3, 1 (1983), pp. 57–83; G. Inalhan and E. Finch, ‘Place Attachment and Sense of Belonging’, *Facilities*, 22, 5/6 (2004), pp. 120–8; A. Popov, ‘Making Sense of Home and Homeland: Former-Soviet Greeks’ Motivations and Strategies for a Transnational Migrant Circuit’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36, 1 (2010), pp. 67–85; M.C. La Barbera, *Identity and Migration in Europe: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Madrid, Spain; Springer, 2014).

29 E.N. Wilmsen and P.A. McAllister, *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1996); Gugler, ‘The Son of the Hawk does not Remain Abroad’.

30 M.L. Cocks, T. Dold and S. Vetter, ‘“God is My Forest”: Xhosa Cultural Values Provide Untapped Opportunities for Conservation’, *South African Journal of Science*, 108, 5–6 (2012), pp. 52–9; M.L. Cocks, J.K. Alexander, L. Mogano and S. Vetter, ‘Ways of Belonging: Meanings of “Nature” among Xhosa-Speaking Township Residents in South Africa’, *Journal of Ethnobiology*, 36, 4 (2016), pp. 820–41;

M.L. Cocks, J.K. Alexander and S. Vetter, ‘Well-Being and Nature Survey’ (unpublished data from 701 respondents from East London, Grahamstown and Bathurst, and the villages of Debe Nek, Qamnyana and Tharfield, 2015, in the possession of Michelle Cocks).

In the following sections, we first contextualise the case study in a theoretical framework of place attachment and belonging, which we used to analyse how the rural landscape with its social and physical components provides a locality where migrants can situate significant constituents of their identity. We then present the background and methodology to the case study, which was conducted over the course of a year and comprised field visits to Centane and Cape Town. The case study investigates respondents' reasons for migrating to Cape Town, the frequency and motivation for return visits and the experiences of coming home. Finally, the case material is discussed in relation to factors that contribute to place attachment and belonging, and how these factors play out in the urban vs. the rural environment. The case material reveals a deep emotional and spiritual connection to the natural environment and the rural landscape, and we conclude by considering how this study contradicts the dominant narrative of 'lack of environmental care' that is typically part of development and conservation narratives concerning rural African landscapes and their residents.

Landscapes of 'Home': Place Attachment and Belonging

'Home' is a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security and emotional attachment. It represents an emotional space that is closely linked to some of our earliest psychological experiences, and it carries memories of childhood, connections to family of origin and cultural and ethnic roots.³¹ 'Home' is a complex phenomenon that incorporates powerful individual elements and experiences, but which is simultaneously situated in a number of larger contexts such as one's family of origin, one's community and one's culture, as well as being influenced by other social phenomena.³² The concepts of place attachment and belonging have been employed extensively in analysing what makes a place 'home' and what factors and processes generate a sense of home and belonging. These two interrelated concepts, particularly as articulated by Jennifer Cross³³ in her interactional framework of place attachment and Marco Antonsich³⁴ in his analytical framework of belonging, provide the lens through which we interpret migrants' attachment to their rural homes and urban work spaces.

Place is space that has been imbued with meaning through personal, group and cultural processes.³⁵ Place attachment is a positive, affective bond people form with particular places where they feel comfortable and safe and desire to maintain their connection.³⁶ Taking a constructivist approach, place attachment can be understood as the interactional processes of associating place with meanings and emotional affection that may occur at the individual, group or cultural level. Authors from several disciplines have discussed how place becomes socially constructed, how place meanings develop and how people become attached to place, or 'emplaced'.³⁷ Building on these previous frameworks of place attachment and based on extensive interview data, Cross³⁸ proposes an interactional framework that comprises seven

31 M.C. Marchetti-Mercer, 'New Meanings of "Home" in South Africa', *Acta Academica-University of the Free State*, 38, 2 (2006), p. 191. See also Gressier, *At Home in the Okavango*.

32 Marchetti-Mercer, 'New Meanings of "Home"'.

33 Cross, 'Processes of Place Attachment'.

34 Antonsich, 'Searching for Belonging'.

35 S.M. Low, 'Symbolic Ties that Bind: Place and Attachment in the Plaza', in I. Altman and S.M. Low (eds), *Place Attachment* (New York, Plenum Press, 1992).

36 M.C. Hidalgo and B. Hernandez, 'Place Attachment: Conceptual and Empirical Questions', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 21, 3 (2001), pp. 273–81; K.H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque, New Mexico; University of New Mexico Press, 1996); R.B. Behrens and V. Watson, *Making Urban Places: Principles and Guidelines for Layout Planning* (Cape Town, Juta Academic, 1996); R. Hay, 'A Rooted Sense of Place in Cross-Cultural Perspective', *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 42, 3 (1998), pp. 245–66.

37 Gressier, *At Home in the Okavango*.

38 Cross, 'Processes of Place Attachment'.

distinct processes through which people form bonds with places: sensory, narrative, historical, spiritual, ideological, commodifying and material dependence. These processes are seen as ‘a series of interactions between individuals’ experience and meaning making’³⁹ and have three key components: first, each has a unique relationship with time and space, with some being stable over time while others grow or decline with increasing interaction with a place; second, they occur simultaneously at the individual, group and cultural levels, and third, they are ‘interactional, having both unique and interactive effects on an individual’s place attachment’.⁴⁰

Sensory processes of forming place attachment tend to be individual (while also reflecting social and cultural influences and norms). Sensory experiences are closely linked to memory and emotion, which are often powerfully evoked when returning home and experiencing the sounds, smells and other sensory experiences associated with home. Through the sensory dimension, landscapes of home, especially natural landscapes, can also be perceived as restorative. *Narrative* processes relate to how stories of home are told, retold and shared, and are an important way of creating and maintaining a shared identity, knowledge of a place and sense of belonging through shared experience. *Historical* processes of place attachment comprise individual, family and cultural experiences, both ordinary and defining, accumulated in a place over time. Experiences take on biographical significance and tie an individual’s experiences to the history of a place. *Spiritual* place attachment refers to a deep sense of belonging to a place that is difficult to articulate and ‘a unique process, separate from the sense of belonging that might emerge over time in a place’.⁴¹ It is the most stable process of place attachment over time, and unlike the narrative and historical processes of place attachment, it is highly individual and largely independent of social and family context. *Ideological* processes of place attachment refer to shared ethical or moral codes or a shared way of life that ties together a community. *Commodifying* place attachment is considered the most transient of the place attachment processes. It is typically the initial appraisal of a place’s traits in relation to a person’s needs (such as employment, retirement, aesthetic qualities), which often diminishes over time as deeper, more stable forms of place attachment develop. Lastly, *material dependence* refers to a person’s reliance on social or financial resources in a place. Material dependence can attach a person to a place they do not necessarily consider ‘home’, but where they live due to circumstance.

Deeply embedded in processes of place attachment are notions of belonging. Belonging can be expressed in relation to a variety of social and spatial terms.⁴² Belonging can be analysed both at the individual, personal level as a feeling of being ‘at home’ (place-belongingness) and as a discursive resource in discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion or exclusion (politics of belonging). Studies may emphasise one or the other of these dimensions, but the two are closely interlinked as individual belonging does not occur in isolation from social factors and vice versa.⁴³ Antonsich⁴⁴ identifies five factors as contributing to the individual sense of place-belongingness, that is, a person’s emotional attachment to a particular place of ‘home’: autobiographical, relational, cultural, economic and legal. *Autobiographical* factors relate to one’s past history and include experiences, memories (including childhood memories and memories of ancestors) and the continued

39 *Ibid.*, p. 514.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*, p. 508.

42 Antonsich, ‘Searching for Belonging’.

43 N. Yuval-Davis, ‘Belonging and the Politics of Belonging’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40, 3 (2006), pp. 197–214. This point is also made about the relationship between political and experiential autochthony in Gressier, *At Home in the Okavango*.

44 Antonsich, ‘Searching for Belonging’.

presence of family in a place. This relates closely to the historical processes of place attachment identified by Cross.⁴⁵ *Relational* factors refer to personal and societal ties that enrich the experience of being in a place and make it feel like home. *Cultural* factors include language, practices, religion and food preparation that create a sense of shared identity and belonging. *Economic* factors are important in creating stable and safe material conditions. They include economic activity and can vary from unemployment to casual labour to a professional career. Economic embeddedness in a place matters from a material perspective, but it also contributes to a feeling of having a stake in the future of a place. *Legal* factors relate to citizenship, permanence and security of tenure and are essential in providing security.

There is considerable convergence between the frameworks outlined by Cross⁴⁶ and Antonsich,⁴⁷ and we regard them as complementary. Both frameworks highlight processes and factors that contribute not only to an individual's sense of attachment and belonging, but more broadly to the ability to lead 'a life that is meaningful, a life worth living'.⁴⁸ Conversely, the absence of place-belongingness has been likened to a sense of loneliness, isolation, alienation and displacement⁴⁹ and can lead to a loss of motivation and mental health problems.⁵⁰ To feel at home in a place is, however, not merely a personal matter but one that is embedded in social factors. Belonging to a social group and to a place – political belonging, or 'citizenship' – are not simply an individual's choice to make but depend on being recognised as part of the community where they live.

The case study of migrants from Centane that we present illustrates how the processes of place attachment, factors determining place-belongingness and politics of belonging play out in the urban and rural environments between which migrants journey. Contrasting the processes of place attachment and belonging in the rural and urban areas sheds light on some of the reasons why migrants continue to journey between the two settings.

The Centane Case Study: Urban–Rural Migration and the Landscapes of 'Home'

Centane is located along the coastal region of the Eastern Cape (near Mazeppa Bay) in the southeast of the former Transkei homeland, and falls under the jurisdiction of the Mquma local municipality in the Amathole District. The population of the region is predominantly Xhosa-speaking, and the region is characterised by a high rural population density of 100–300 persons per square kilometre.⁵¹ Mquma municipality has some of the highest levels of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment in the Eastern Cape Province.⁵² The area remains characterised by poor roads, infrastructure, resources and public services.⁵³ Employment opportunities are low with only 25 per cent of the population employed. The remaining 75 per

45 Cross, 'Processes of Place Attachment'.

46 *Ibid.*

47 Antonsich, 'Searching for Belonging'.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 649.

49 *Ibid.*

50 D. Menzies and B. Davidson, 'Authenticity and Belonging: The Experience of Being Known in the Group', *Group Analysis* 35, 1 (2002), pp. 43–55.

51 Statistics South Africa, Community Survey, 2007: Basic Results Municipalities (Pretoria, Statistics South Africa, 2011), available at <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P03011/P030112007.pdf>, retrieved 5 June 2019.

52 RIDP (Reviewed Integrated Development Plan), Amathole District Municipality, South Africa (2014–15); available at <http://mfma.treasury.gov.za/Documents/01.%20Integrated%20Development%20Plans/2014-15/03.%20Districts/DC12%20Amathole/DC12%20Amathole%20Draft%20%20IDP%202014-2015.pdf>, retrieved 5 June 2019.

53 L. Bank and G. Minkley, 'Going Nowhere Slowly? Land, Livelihoods and Rural Development in the Eastern Cape', *Social Dynamics*, 31, 1 (2005) pp. 1–38.

cent are either unemployed or economically inactive and are reliant on welfare support.⁵⁴ Journeying to Cape Town remains a dominant means to access cash incomes. The decades since the advent of democracy have seen an increase in female migrants.⁵⁵

Migrant participants in both Centane and Cape Town were located through snowballing, a technique of finding research participants through other research participants. Recruitment of research participants was done with the help of a research assistant who hailed from Centane and a contact list of migrants from family members whom the first author had encountered in Centane. Locating migrants from Centane in the informal settlements of Cape Town would not have been feasible without this contact information from ‘home’, but as a result the sample reflects a population of rural migrants who had retained rural family ties, who have typically settled in informal settlements with poor living conditions, and who fell within the working class (and were, in practice, often temporarily unemployed). As such, the insecurities and vulnerabilities of where they were settled in the city are likely to have limited their attachment to these areas and discouraged investing in them. This was found to be the case in another study among migrants from the former Transkei who, like our respondents, were identified via contacts in the rural area and who had retained connections with their rural households.⁵⁶

In total 36 migrants (12 women and 24 men ranging in age from 17 to 67) were interviewed over an eight-month period between April and December 2014. Data-gathering stages consisted of four site visits: an initial visit to Centane to obtain contact information for migrants from the area who worked in Cape Town, followed by two visits to Cape Town and a return visit to Centane over the December festive season. Data collection comprised in-depth interviews and informal conversations at both locations and participant observation of activities, including rituals, in Centane. Participant observation in Cape Town was constrained as participants needed to work, and cramped living conditions and security concerns made living with participants difficult or impossible.

All interviews were conducted in isiXhosa, which was the first language of both the interviewer and the interviewees. Most interviews were conducted in the presence of a Xhosa-speaking assistant who helped with locating respondents, making contacts and ensuring the researcher’s safety in the informal settlements of Cape Town. Certain emotive and even painful narratives were shared only when the researcher was alone with her informants, and in some cases respondents indicated that they had previously only shared these with close friends and relatives as they felt too vulnerable to discuss them in general conversations. All the interviews were translated and transcribed in English by the first author.⁵⁷ Themes in relation to specific lines of questioning were identified and coded, making it possible to rank the dominant recurring themes across the interviews. Pseudonyms are used to protect respondents’ identities.

We Are Still Journeying: Reasons for Migrating

With limited employment opportunities within the Mquma municipality, people from Centane continued journeying to Cape Town to seek work. While economic motivations

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵⁵ D. Posel and D. Casele, ‘Internal Labour Migration and Household Poverty in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, in H. Bhorat and R. Kannup (eds), *Poverty and Policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2006); A. Westaway, ‘Rural Poverty in the Eastern Cape Province: Legacy of Apartheid or Consequence of Contemporary Segregationism?’ *Development Southern Africa*, 29, 1 (2012), pp. 115–25; Bank, ‘City Slums, Rural Homesteads’.

⁵⁶ Lohnert and Steinbrink, ‘Rural and Urban Livelihoods’.

⁵⁷ Copies of the transcribed/translated interviews are retained by the first and second authors. The data is protected by password on each computer as required by the Rhodes University ethics guidelines.

underpinned the decision to migrate to Cape Town, migrants also alluded to other factors that contributed towards their decisions: joining one's spouse or partner, pursuing better educational opportunities, seeking social status and acceptance in one's home community, and mending broken family ties. Cape Town was chosen because of established social networks, including family members and other migrants from Centane, who helped with finding accommodation and employment and provided bonds of shared memories, practices and stories. These social networks of family and 'homeboys' (*abakhaya*) helped migrants to cope with social isolation and integrate into a new environment.⁵⁸

Just over half of the women interviewed had followed their husbands or partners to Cape Town. Kholiwe (35) first came to Cape Town in the early 2000s to visit her husband. Initially she only intended to stay for three months, but while there she found an opportunity to earn an income as a street vendor, selling freshly slaughtered chickens, and decided to stay. In contrast to her husband, she returns home as regularly as she can to see their children and to repair and maintain their homestead. She explained that she also returns home to carry out 'wifely duties' which included caring for her in-laws and maintaining her *igoqo*.⁵⁹

The quality of education offered in most rural areas remains inferior to that offered in urban areas as resources and qualified teachers are unevenly distributed. These opportunities have contributed to young children and adults from Centane migrating to Cape Town. Senzo (17 years old) was completing his last year of schooling at the time of the interview. He had spent most of his life in Centane, but after completing grade 10, he joined his uncle's family in Cape Town to improve his education. Despite initial difficulties adjusting, he believed that being educated in Cape Town opened up opportunities, such as the possibility of a university education, that would have been impossible had he completed his schooling at home in Centane. Other migrants wanted a better education in the city for their children, and some were either planning to embark on, or busy completing, post-secondary qualifications.

Migrating to the city remains associated with prestige and status in the rural home community, as one has the ability to return home with cash to maintain one's household structures, buy cattle, perform rituals and marry. This is particularly important to male migrants, for whom being able to provide in the rural home was closely tied to dignity and self-respect, as expressed by Bongikhaya (67): 'A person, particularly a man, who does not work or cannot afford to own livestock or build his homestead is never taken seriously in the village, especially among other men. When he makes comments among other men [...] he is told "what could a hungry man say that is important?"'. Similar values have been recorded in earlier work on circular migration in the Eastern Cape,⁶⁰ where the commitment to maintain one's *umzi* (homestead) was found to be deeply entrenched within local

58 See also Lohnert and Steinbrink, who in 'Rural and Urban Livelihoods' describe the role of 'Amakhaya-Groups' in facilitating, stabilising and reinforcing circular migration by migrants living and moving between a Cape Town informal settlement and their rural village in the former Transkei.

59 The *igoqo* (pl. *amagoqo*) is a symbolic woodpile that serves as a sanctuary for a woman, particularly a married woman, as it is perceived as representing the seat for the female ancestors of the homestead (both paternal and maternal). The presence of an *igoqo* ties the female ancestors to a specific place. See M.L. Cocks, L. Bangay, K.F. Wiersum and A.P. Dold, 'Seeing the Wood for the Trees: The Role of Woody Resources for the Construction of Gender Specific Household Cultural Artefacts in Non-Traditional Communities in the Eastern Cape, South Africa', *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 8, 4 (2006), pp. 519–33.

60 See, especially, the chapter by P.A. McAllister, 'Work, Homestead and the Shades: The Ritual Interpretation of Labour Migration among the Gcaleka', in P. Mayer (ed.), *Black Villagers in an Industrial Society: Anthropological Perspectives on Labour Migration in South Africa* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1980); L. Bank, 'Men with Cookers: Transformations in Migrant Culture, Domesticity and Identity in Duncan Village, East London', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25, 3 (1999), pp. 393–416.

conceptions of *ubudoda* (manhood). Bank⁶¹ found that women’s status was also becoming increasingly attached to the maintenance of one’s *umzi*, particularly for those earning an income.

Parents’ absenteeism due to labour migration has had a detrimental effect on children, as their parents were unable to play an active role in their lives. The era of democracy has seen an increase in migration, particularly in female migrants. This has contributed even further to the breakdown of family structures as many young children are now being placed under the care of extended family members.⁶² Some respondents migrated to Cape Town to mend broken ties with absentee family members. Bulelani (23) had recently arrived in Cape Town in search of his mother. He had grown up without his parents – who were separated and both working in Cape Town – and was raised by his aunt, with whom he had an acrimonious relationship. He remembers the shame and deprivation of living in poverty and was determined to gain independence and a fresh start in life.

Life in the City

The townships on the outskirts of major cities experienced a rapid growth of migrants after the abolition of the Group Areas Act and Influx Control laws in 1986. In 2009, an estimate claimed that Cape Town had more than 220 informal settlements, with a population of about 900,000.⁶³ Many respondents described being appalled by the cramped and unsanitary living conditions they found in Khayelitsha and Philippi and how these affected them psychologically. Many of the migrants who were interviewed struggled to make ends meet and to save up for visits home, and lived in informal settlements or backyard shacks. Respondents described their environment and living conditions as ‘confined’ and ‘congested’. Many were concerned about crime, corruption and hazards such as raw sewage and fires in the dense shack settlements.

Most of the interviewed migrants described feelings of estrangement while living in Cape Town and said they could never feel a sense of belonging in the city. Contributing factors included the language spoken and their inability to perform certain rituals in the city environment. The dialect of isiXhosa spoken in Cape Town, which was referred to as *tsotsitaal*, is an informal mixture of Xhosa, English and Afrikaans that stresses urban and modern identity, whereas the Gcaleka dialect spoken by Centane migrants reflects an agrarian and more traditional Xhosa identity.⁶⁴ This language gap made some respondents feel misunderstood and not part of the city community. When Gcobani (44) first arrived in Cape Town, he was often teased and labelled *unolali* (farmboy) by his co-workers who were born in Cape Town. The absence of one’s ancestors and extended family and the congested nature of the living conditions prevented many from performing family and ancestral rituals that were important to them. Their ancestors were linked to their rural home areas via graves and the homestead, and, in the city the natural environment required to carry out many rituals, particularly male initiation (‘going to the bush’), was unavailable. Monelisi (37) argued that if he performed a thanksgiving ritual in the city, ‘it would be a waste of my money. I would need to do the same ritual when I got back home as my ancestors will only acknowledge it there’. Khwezi (22) did not want to do his initiation in Cape Town:

61 Bank, ‘Urban Slums, Rural Homesteads’, p. 1077.

62 D. Posel and D. Casale, ‘What has been Happening to Internal Labour Migration in South Africa, 1993–1999?’ *South African Journal of Economics*, 71, 3 (2003), pp. 455–79.

63 A. Mels, D. Castellano, O. Braadbaart, S. Veenstra, I. Dijkstra, B. Meulman and J.A. Wilsenach, ‘Sanitation Services for the Informal Settlements of Cape Town, South Africa’, *Desalination*, 248, 1 (2009), p. 331.

64 T. Dowling, ‘“Stressed and Sexy”: Lexical Borrowing in Cape Town Xhosa’, *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 8, 4 (2011), pp. 345–66.

[t]here is no *ihlathi* (forest) here. We would have no privacy. The men who carry out their initiation rituals in the city do not spend enough time at initiation school and are not exposed to all the teachings about manhood that we need to know. If I did my initiation ritual in Cape Town, I would not be recognised as a man by my peers in the rural area or receive blessings from my ancestors.

Many respondents relied on social networks for financial resources and emotional support to cope with the difficulties experienced on arrival and while remaining in Cape Town. Use of social networks was enabled by seeking out and living close to other Centane migrants. With the resulting close sense of community came considerable social pressures, however, particularly if one was perceived not to be showing responsibility and respect for one's tradition and family obligations. Similar findings have been recorded by Mayer,⁶⁵ who noted that maintaining links with home was perceived as the 'only way in which a man could retain his dignity and independence'. Homeboys and elders would impress upon new arrivals that working in town was a necessity to support the rural base.⁶⁶ Some men interviewed for the study delayed their return visits because of the pressure they felt from family and the broader community to be successful. Buhle (26), for example, said he delays until he has saved enough to provide for his family at home because 'as a migrant worker, I cannot just have enough money for a bus fare. I need to come home bearing gifts'. Andile (42) felt stigmatised by his peers in the city, too, for not fulfilling the socially expected duties and obligations to his rural home. He was labelled as *itshipa*, a derogatory term used to describe male migrants who have been lured into the urban lifestyle and disregard the responsibility to take care of their homestead, wife and children in the rural area.⁶⁷ They are described as returning home infrequently and irregularly, seldom, if ever, sending money to their families.⁶⁸ As Andile says:

what I hate about going home is that I feel I have failed my mother [...] When I see her grave with no headstone and our homestead structures in a state of disrepair, I feel guilty. When I was last there, I told myself I need to save money so I can rebuild our homestead. Only then will I return home to visit her grave and be comfortable to be in the village. I have now been working for many years but I still cannot afford to pay for these costs. I still live in hope that one day I will be able to rebuild my home, because I do not belong in Cape Town, I am nobody here.

Female migrants were not subjected to the same financial expectations, and this made it possible for them to return home more regularly. Bongeka (31) described how, before she got married, she would simply pack her bags and return home when she could not find work in the city. She would find casual work just to have enough money for the bus fare: 'I always knew I would be accepted at home, my parents loved me anyways even if I did not have anything to offer'.

Returning Home

For many respondents, what made life in the city bearable was the prospect of returning home. Tat'Bhele (58) exemplified this when he said 'Knowing that I will soon go home

65 Mayer, *Black Villagers in an Industrial Society*, p. 43.

66 Similar findings have been reported in a number of other studies, including S. Bekker, 'Diminishing Returns: Circulatory Migration Linking Cape Town to the Eastern Cape', *South African Journal of Demography*, 8, 1 (2001–02), pp. 1–8; Lohnert and Steinbrink, 'Rural and Urban Livelihoods', and Bank, 'City Slums, Rural Homesteads'.

67 D.A. Fay, 'Keeping Land for Their Children: Generation, Migration and Land in South Africa's Transkei', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 5 (2015), pp. 1083–97.

68 Bank, 'Men with Cookers', p. 47.

gives me strength to face the everyday life of Khayelitsha. The only time I feel happy is when someone from home visits and we catch up about things happening back home'. All of the 36 migrants interviewed returned home at varying frequencies or stated an intention to do so once they had accumulated enough money. Over half (21) returned at least once a year, during Christmas holidays, with the same percentage (58 per cent) of men and women returning annually. Four respondents (three women and one man) had returned more frequently to attend to family emergencies and attend family funerals and ceremonies. Nine migrants returned less than once a year, while two had arrived in Cape Town within the last three years and not yet made a return trip. Significantly more men than women postponed their return trip to every second or third year or had visited even less frequently. The most commonly given reason was the financial obligation placed on men, which many struggled to meet. Andile (42) was raised by a single mother. When he came of age, he became the household head but has struggled to fulfil his financial obligations:

after the death of my mother in 1997, and being the only child with an absent father, I was faced with the financial burden of taking care of my homestead back in the village. My inability to do so led me to stay in Cape Town for over five years without returning to my rural home.

Between trips, imagining and even dreaming about the rural home provided consolation and evoked longing in equal measures. Kholekile (26) felt stifled by the confines of his living conditions, but spending time at home helped him to maintain perspective and hope:

in the city, the living space doesn't allow me to think beyond today. When I'm at home the landscape of the rural area gives me hope, it gives me a broader perspective of things that allows me to visualise my future. When I stand outside my home I can see livestock grazing in the fields, and beautiful structures in other homesteads. These things give me encouragement as one day, I too will own livestock and build appealing structures at home.

Thoughts and even dreams of home were mentioned by many of the migrants interviewed. Bongikhaya (67) recounted dreaming of his rural home:

after a long day at work, I come home exhausted and I go to sleep. In my dreams, I am sleeping in my bed at home. I can see myself waking up and walking to the *ihlathi*. I can feel the breeze of the *ihlathi* on my skin and smell the strong scent of plants and trees. I feel refreshed and less tired. In my dream I also think about the time I was a young boy. When I wake up I feel heavy-hearted as I realise I am not at home and I long to return so that I can walk in the *ihlathi* again.

Faniswa (43) described how she would get anxious to go home as the end of the year drew near:

closer to my leave dates, I suddenly get exhausted, and my heart is no longer here in Cape Town. I cannot explain what it is, but I guess it is the thought of knowing you are not home, but the minute I get home, I suddenly feel fresh. I even walk barefoot just to feel the grass under my feet.

Fezile (36) described his mounting anticipation on the eve of his return trip: 'on the day I leave, it is as though the transport is taking forever to arrive. I cannot even wait for the sun to rise. My life is in the rural area, my mother, my children live there. I always get excited when I am planning to go home'.

Returning allowed migrants to reconnect with family, friends and community members. Asenathi (43) felt that being at home gave her inner strength and blessing:

sometimes just being at home where my umbilical cord is buried and where my family is, without even doing anything to appease my ancestors, I get a feeling that things will be better. I gain *impilo* (well-being). The encouraging words from elders give me good luck. People even say that if things are not going well for you in the city, it may be because you have not gone home in a while.

For Carol (23), going home to reconnect with childhood friends and family validated her existence, as she often felt invisible and alienated in the city: 'I am nobody in the city, but when I am home I feel happy and my peers notice that I have not been around'.

The ability to perform rituals in the presence of family and kin, at the site where one's ancestors reside, was considered a necessity and a significant motivating factor for returning home. Rituals and ceremonies considered important to perform included the unveiling of tombstones, wedding ceremonies, negotiations of bride wealth, initiation rites for young men and ritual beer drinks⁶⁹ to thank ancestors for success in the city. Bulelani (24) summed up a generally held sentiment when he said, 'I am a Xhosa person; we Xhosa are people of rituals. I need to be able to go home to learn how my clan performs rituals, so that when I have children I can perform birth and coming of age rituals for them, and be able to impart that knowledge to them'. For the respondents, the performance of rituals was deemed impossible in Cape Town where they were merely 'visitors'.

The physical and financial ability to maintain one's homestead was also considered a key motivating factor to return home; it helped to restore one's social standing, which many felt that they did not have in Cape Town. For Bulelwa (35) returning home meant that she and her husband could paint and refurnish their homestead with the money that they had saved. The refurnishing of the homesteads did not only include coats of paint and the purchasing of modern amenities⁷⁰ but also the restoration and maintenance of traditional structures such as the *ubuhlanti* (kraal) and *igoqo* (woodpile). The *ubuhlanti* is an integral part of ritual performance, and all male migrants interviewed attested to the fact that a well-maintained *ubuhlanti* formed part of their identity as men. A homestead without an *ubuhlanti* was considered *ayinasidima* (not dignified, indecent) and indicative of a man who is irresponsible and does not care about tradition. A similar status is attached to a well-maintained *igoqo*. Bulelwa (35) described how one of the first things she does when she returns home is to go to the forest to collect firewood for her *igoqo*. A well-stocked and tidy *igoqo* was especially important when hosting rituals, as visitors and family members would take notice of the state of one's *igoqo*. Maintaining the *ubuhlanti* or *igoqo* requires time spent cutting wood in the forest, an activity that itself was described as bringing enjoyment and satisfaction. Kholiwe (35) had collected wood since she was a girl. She considered going to the forest to cut wood as being integral to her identity as a hard-working Xhosa woman.

For many the ability to revisit childhood places and rekindle memories was an important part of returning home. This often included revisiting places in the surrounding natural environment. Many of the migrants considered going home to be an opportunity to leave the polluted, noisy city life of Cape Town for a while and feel revitalised by the tranquil rural environment that home offered. Restorative properties of the forest, rivers and sea are also attributed to the presence of ancestors within each of these.⁷¹ Baxolele (43) has been working in Cape Town for the past 19 years. When he returns home he revisits the places of his childhood, including the forest:

69 P. McAllister, *Building the Homestead: Agriculture, Labour and Beer in South Africa's Transkei*, (Aldershot; Ashgate, for the African Studies Centre, Leiden; 2001).

70 Bank, 'City Slums, Rural Homesteads'.

71 Cocks, Dold and Vetter, 'God is My Forest'.

it feels good to walk on paths that I have not walked on for a long time. These paths are important to me because I grew up walking on them. While I'm walking there I think about the time when I lived in the village, and long for the time that I would leave Cape Town and return home permanently, so I can walk on these paths regularly. [...] The memories I created in the *ihlathi* are part of who I am. When I am in those places, I feel as though my blood rushes freely in my body to an extent that I wish to stay.

Faniswa (43) described a similar emotional connection with the natural landscape of her childhood. While she is at the river, she immerses her feet in the water and reminisces about her childhood memories of growing up in the village. After spending time at the river, she always feels refreshed and that her spirit has been lifted.

Revisiting places of childhood did not only evoke memories, but also provided opportunities to centre one's life and find a sense of peace, particularly for those who felt a disjunction between their perception of self and their current realities. Bantu (38) was born in Cape Town but used to visit Centane regularly with his parents during the holidays. He has fond memories of these times and a strong attachment to the places he visited there as a child. When he reached 11, his parents decided to send him home to live permanently with his grandmother because he had become involved in gangsterism in the city. After finishing his junior years of schooling, he returned to Cape Town to complete high school. Upon arriving in Cape Town, he resumed his illegal activities with his gang:

Gugulethu is notorious, and for someone to be respected in the community they need to join a gang. As a result, I re-joined my gang, and through that I have done unforgivable things to people. However, when I go back home, and immerse myself in the river where I used to play in as a child, I think of the olden days and hear voices in my head as though I am a child again. I think of the dreams I had as a child. When I come out of the water, I feel like a changed man, as though the river has washed my sins away, and I return to Cape Town feeling forgiven and more powerful. Whenever I feel lost, or a lack of motivation in the city, I always return to the landscapes of my childhood. This helps to navigate my life.

Conclusion: Constructing Belonging and Place-Attachment

When we examine how processes of place attachment and belonging play out in the city and the rural areas, it becomes clear that the rural area, despite the lack of economic opportunities, is 'home' for most respondents. While the city provides economic opportunities, and being a migrant is often a pre-requisite for 'making it' in the rural areas, the rural home contributes to a sense of belonging in myriad ways, including a long-term economic embeddedness that was elusive for many (though not all) in the city. This picture may change somewhat if the views and perceptions of longer-term and more successful urban residents with rural roots are examined. Nevertheless, it is telling that even longer-term urban residents in Durban,⁷² who had no stated intention to return to their rural home, considered themselves to be members of their rural households. Township residents in Grahamstown revealed widely prevalent positive feelings about nature and attachment to rural landscapes, regardless of length of stay.⁷³

Narratives of rural areas are rich with portrayals of the *sensory* experiences and the memories and associations they evoke. The rural landscape, especially natural features such as rivers and forests, are experienced as restorative and reviving. In the urban areas, the sensory associations are mostly negative – crowded living conditions, unpleasant smells of refuse and sewage, unattractive shacks. Some migrants spoke of imagining or even dreaming

72 Posel and Marx, 'Circular Migration: A View from Destination Households'.

73 Cocks, Alexander, Mogano and Vetter, 'Ways of Belonging'.

of the sensory experience of the rural areas as an ‘antidote’ to the unpleasant and depressing sensory experiences in the city.

Most respondents had accumulated, and enjoyed remembering, life experiences in the rural areas (*historical* attachment). These included both the everyday activities (such as walks along familiar paths) that they sought to relive and keep alive during visits, as well as defining life events such as initiation and other rites of passages that ‘belonged’ in the rural areas. Migrants’ historical association with the city was less pronounced, even among those respondents who had lived in the city a long time. This was especially so in the case of those respondents whose hopes were frustrated in the city and who associated city life with a history of disappointment and failure. For others, however, life in the city has added a positive aspect to their own history through education, material success and independence.

The role of stories in binding people to the rural home emerged strongly, with *narrative* place attachment leading to migrants identifying as both *amagoduka* (migrants) in the rural area and *abakhaya* (homeboys) in the city. Stories of home shared among fellow Centane migrants in Cape Town provided not only relief and solace but also acceptance and belonging to a social group. Despite the harsh realities and often poor quality of the lived experience of working in the city, stories of city life also appeared to contribute to the group identity and social status of migrants when in the rural area. The narrative processes of place attachment documented here thus feed strongly into group identity and belonging, central to the politics of place.

Many respondents related experiences and feelings of deep belonging, or *spiritual* attachment, to the rural areas. These were often confided in one-on-one conversations in an atmosphere of trust, as they were deeply personal and not easily articulated. Cross²⁵ found that spiritual attachment processes are very stable and do not rely on length or frequency of time spent in a place for their existence. Here, and in our previous research, we similarly found that these spiritual attachments are remarkably enduring, even when people have only very rare opportunities to spend time in the natural environment. Spiritual attachment is also often linked to very specific places via the presence of ancestral spirits and conveyed through dreams. No attachments of a spiritual nature were described for the city.

Ideological place attachment is strong in the rural areas, with a strong sense of shared beliefs, practices and social norms. This was perceived by many as affirming, familiar and supportive, and was juxtaposed with the moral decay and crime associated with the city. It is also true, however, that the expectations stemming from this strong social code were experienced by several respondents as stressful. Men, especially, found that visiting the rural home without bringing back material evidence of success in the city was associated with shame, and this prevented several respondents from visiting more frequently. Women seemed less pressured in that respect, while also taking advantage of the more relaxed social norms around womanly roles and behaviours in the city. Most women appeared to be able to switch between their city and country identities and roles with relative ease.

Commodifying attachment was mainly associated with the city environment, where migrants primarily go in order to meet economic, social and other needs. For many respondents, this emerged as the main form of attachment to the city, where other forms of attachment were less well developed. The rural areas do meet migrants’ expectations of aesthetic preference, but these were less strongly articulated than the sensory, historical and narrative attachment processes.

Material dependence is the obvious other point of attachment to the city, where migrants live in order to achieve economic gain and other objectives such as education. It also manifests in the rural areas, however, as many practices and rituals are impossible to carry out in the city where the proper resources, spaces and people are unavailable.

Similar to the historical process of place attachment, *autobiographical* factors⁷⁴ were portrayed to be strong in creating a sense of belonging to the rural home. Not only are memories, the presence of family members and respondents' personal history linked to the rural home, but the homestead with its *ubuhlanti* and *igoqo* is also the site of connection with one's ancestors, as are the forest and river. The city environment provides far less of such an 'anchor'.

Relational factors contributing a sense of belonging were similarly important in the rural home. Spending time with family and friends was one of the important reasons for returning home and something many respondents drew strength from. In the city, many of the close and supportive relationships respondents had were with family members and others from their rural home community.

Cultural factors, from engaging in everyday practices such as collecting wood and water to taking part in family rituals, were a key feature of time spent in the rural area and something most respondents felt unable to do or experience in the city. Some respondents also mentioned how the language spoken marked newcomers out as different and 'other', and how the food associated with home was seldom prepared in the city and did not taste the same.

Economic factors drew people to the city, although not everyone succeeded in achieving their goals. Work in the city was regarded by many as primarily serving as a means to invest in the rural home, where long-term investments in homesteads were made. While the city thus serves as a space of economic gain, the rural area is a place of economic embeddedness.

In the past, under apartheid (and as in the situation of transnational migrants), *legal* factors prevented a permanent family life in the city. This is no longer the case in South Africa, but as Bank⁷⁵ argues, citizenship in the fuller sense (symbolised by a serviced home in the city, such as an RDP house) eludes many migrants. In response, many choose to assert their citizenship in the rural home where they are able to invest in a permanent home, despite having no formal security of tenure.

It becomes clear from the above that many of the processes of place attachment, while experienced by individuals, are deeply socially embedded. Narratives of the rural home, as well as of life in the city, forge group bonds and migrant identities that allow migrants to stake a claim in both a rural place and its community.

In analysing the processes that create place attachment, we found remarkable similarities to the case material that Cross⁷⁶ presents from mainly white, and relatively affluent, residents of Nevada County in California, on which her framework is based. This is illustrated by Gressier in her ethnographic study of white Batswana in the Okavango, which shows how a life spent in a place and within a society generated a deep sense of belonging and emplacement.⁷⁷ However, the enduring attachment to particular places via family history, the homestead, ancestors' graves and even one's own buried umbilical cord appears much stronger in the case of Xhosa-speaking migrants. While it is possible to form multiple or shifting place attachments – and some respondents in our study⁷⁸ indicated their desire to settle in rural areas other than their original home – the ties that bind people to their places of origin go deeper than just their own experiences and are deeply embedded in a way of being. This is not limited to rural areas – long-time residents of urban areas also feel a strong sense of belonging to ancestral places, many of which (such as Sophiatown in

74 Antonsich, 'Searching for Belonging'.

75 Bank, 'City Slums, Rural Homesteads'.

76 Cross, 'Processes of Place Attachment'.

77 Gressier, *At Home in the Okavango*.

78 Also Bank, 'City Slums, Rural Homesteads'.

Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town) no longer exist. A recent series of articles in the *Mail & Guardian* by Lucas Ledwaba draws attention to this, with each article prefaced with ‘The land is not just the dusty earth on which we stand. It is a kinship with our ancestors. It is the urgent aspiration for dignity and agency’. His stories illustrate the attachment of rural and urban people to their ancestral homes and sacred sites,⁷⁹ but also the new attachments formed by Mozambican migrants to their new homes in South Africa.⁸⁰

The Centane migrants’ narratives of their home landscapes are strikingly rich and multifaceted in their portrayal of nature, memory, spirituality and intricate social networks that contribute to a deeply felt sense of belonging. The depth and prevalence of spiritual attachment and connection to the natural environment has featured little in previous studies of migrants and their relationship with the rural home. It is possible that, apart from the research focus and themes explored in the interviews, the identity of the field researcher as a young, black, Xhosa-speaking woman made it easier to elicit these sentiments from respondents, especially younger men and women who would often confide deeply personal experiences ‘off the record’. Lydia Mogano⁸¹, also a young, black, female researcher, aptly refers to ‘unearthing’ people’s perceptions of nature in her phenomenological study of the lived experiences and associations rural and urban Xhosa-speaking people had in relation to their environment. She, too, found respondents confiding in her with deeply moving and intense stories of their relationship with nature. In one case, a woman contemplated suicide but found that going to *ihlathi* she was unable to proceed and encouraged to keep living: ‘it is as if the trees were encouraging me to persevere and live healthier and longer. They helped me to think about myself and restore my hope in my life after the betrayal and ordeal I had experienced’.⁸²

The appreciative, spiritual and often deeply personal portrayal of the natural environment we encountered is in stark contrast to the dominant narrative of degradation and lack of care about the natural environment that pervades much of the literature and development agenda in the rural areas. Conservation and agriculture, the two dominant land-use sectors in the rural areas, are still deeply racialised and rooted in modernist and colonial ideologies that de-humanise people’s relationships to land and perpetuate the modernist nature–culture dualism. These prevalent narratives have been powerful in excluding people from existing and proposed conservation areas,⁸³ limiting land use and access and imposing inappropriate agricultural interventions.⁸⁴ Existing counter-narratives have focused on aspects of environmental justice and resource/land rights aspects⁸⁵ and the role rural areas play as sites of investment, social reproduction, citizenship and identity.⁸⁶ Less has been written on the attitudes, feelings and attachments of local people to their rural landscapes and their natural

79 For example, L. Ledwaba, ‘The Last People Stand Alone in the Face of Platinum’s Bulldozers’, *Mail & Guardian*, 15 September 2017; L. Ledwaba, ‘From Slum City to Urban Living Hub: How Jo’burg Got Its Groove Back’, *Mail & Guardian*, 27 October 2017; L. Ledwaba, ‘The Battle to Salvage the Soul of Venda’s Sacred Sites’, *Mail & Guardian*, 4 May 2018; available at <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-05-04-00-battle-to-salvage-the-soul-of-vendas-sacred-sites>, retrieved 5 June 2019.

80 L. Ledwaba, ‘Mozambican War Victims Embrace Their New Home in Limpopo’, *Mail & Guardian*, 15 December 2017.

81 L. Mogano, ‘Unearthing the Essence of Nature and the Perception of Natural Landscape among amaXhosa in the Eastern Cape: An Exploratory Study’ (MA thesis; Rhodes University, Grahamstown; 2013), available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10962/d1007742>, retrieved 5 June 2019.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

83 For an analysis, see T. Kepe and D. Tessaro, ‘Trading Off: Rural Food Security and Land Rights in South Africa’, *Land Use Policy*, 36 (2014), pp. 267–74.

84 S. Vetter, ‘Development and Sustainable Management of Rangeland Commons: Aligning Policy with the Realities of South Africa’s Rural Landscape’, *African Journal of Range & Forage Science*, 30, 1-2 (2013).

85 Kepe and Tessaro, ‘Trading Off: Rural Food Security and Land Rights’.

86 Ainslie, ‘Farming Cattle, Cultivating Relationships’; Bank, ‘City Slums, Rural Homesteads’.

environments,⁸⁷ particularly in the context of rural–urban migration. We would thus like to conclude this article with the hope that our study contributes to a more complex and nuanced counter-narrative to prevailing neoliberal interpretations of the relationship of rural people with their land.

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87 See Cocks, Dold and Vetter, ‘God is My Forest’; J.K. Alexander, M.L. Cocks and C.M. Shackleton, ‘The Landscape of Childhood: Play and Place as Tools to Understanding Children’s Environmental Use and Perceptions’, *Human Ecology*, 43, 3 (2015), pp. 467–80; M. Cocks, S. Vetter and K.F. Wiersum, ‘From Universal to Local: Perspectives on Cultural Landscape Heritage in South Africa’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 24, 1 (2018), pp. 35–52.