

# INCOMPLETE HISTORY CURRICULUM? TEACHING SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGH SCHOOLS.<sup>1</sup> FROM AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE

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## **Abstract**

*The article presents a challenge to the History high schools' curriculum by depicting that among the secondary concepts currently used in the understanding of History in high schools in South Africa the socio-environmental concept has been ignored which poses a question of whether or not the high school History curriculum is complete. According to Jared Diamond, societies collapse due to diverse reasons but environment is key.<sup>2</sup> Hence D Worster,<sup>3</sup> W Cronon<sup>4</sup> and N Jacobs argue that the environment does not just represent a historical backdrop, but is an agent in its own right, providing a "material base for the power to dominate others" as well as the "power to endure domination".<sup>5</sup> The case study of forced removals from Lady Selborne in 1961 and resettlement in Ga-Rankuwa in Pretoria demonstrates that forced removals from Lady Selborne did not only result in people losing their historical lands, material possessions, homes, history and their sense of being and connectedness but they also lost their attachment to their inheritance – the environment which resulted in their being apathetic towards environmental issues. Thus, the article proposes the inclusion of socio-environmental concepts in history which will provide a crucial step in terms of inculcating environmental activism and ethics among the youth of South Africa.*

**Keywords:** Teaching History; Incomplete curriculum, Lady Selborne; Ga-Rankuwa; Socio-environmental perspective; Forced removals.

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1 High schools in this article implies grade 8–12.

2 D Diamond, "Why societies collapse" (available at: [http://www.ted.com/talks/jared\\_diamond](http://www.ted.com/talks/jared_diamond), as accessed on 28 June 2013).

3 D Worster, "Theories of the environmental history", *Environmental Review*, 11(4), 1987, pp. 251-253.

4 W Cronon, "Modes of prophecy and production: Placing nature in History", *The Journal of American History*, 76, 1990, pp. 1122-1131.

5 N Jacobs, *Environment, power and injustice: A South African History* (Cambridge, University Press, 2003), p. 219.

## Introduction

From as early as the 1960s and 1970s there have been warnings by ecologists, organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Zero Population Growth and the media about imminent universal environmental disasters and suggest that drastic changes must occur to change the prevailing pattern of environmental misuse.<sup>6</sup> Environmental activists have also recently echoed the same chorus. The Jared Diamond video had an enormous impact on me revealing how important the environment is in contributing to the downfall of all societies.<sup>7</sup> Socio-Environmental studies are important, and provide more than a backdrop to power struggles as this article demonstrates. Hence Merchant argues that “nature is a whole of which humans are only one part” which explains that a person is part of the environment and through it holistic life is also realised.<sup>8</sup> JC McCann takes this further stating that; environmental factors influence historical changes<sup>9</sup> and that historical transformation impacts on the environment. For this reason, this study deviates from E Croll and D Parkin, who argue that, “the study of nature can be studied separate from human society”.<sup>10</sup> This view has been interpreted as a basic “western” philosophy on nature, perceiving nature from a mechanical perspective whereby humanity and its environment are compartmentalised. This is not the normative African indigenous world-view that perceives nature and humanity interacting in a holistic way. The latter view calls upon negotiation and interaction with nature while the former emphasises its manipulation and domination. In this article I argue that humanity and nature share a dynamic collaborative relationship and that both require each other for survival. Historians have often neglected the environmental perspective and relegated it to the writings of geographers and the like, but increasingly historians of Southern Africa are integrating the

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6 RB Stevenson, “Schooling and environmental education: Contradictions in purpose and practice”, *Environmental Education Research*, 13(2), 2007, pp. 139-153.

7 D Diamond, “Why societies collapse” (available at: [http://www.ted.com/talks/jared\\_diamond](http://www.ted.com/talks/jared_diamond), as accessed on 28 June 2013).

8 C Merchant, “The theoretical structure of ecological revolutions”, *Environmental Review*, 11(4), 1987, p. 267.

9 JC McCann, *Green land, brown land, black land: An environmental history of Africa 1800-1990* (Oxford, Heinemann Portsmouth, 1999), p. 48.

10 F Croll & D Parkin, *Bush base: Forest farm: Culture, environment and development* (London, Routledge, 1992).

environmental dimension into their social and even economic and political history which is one of the aims of this article.<sup>11</sup>

In this article some omissions in the South African History curriculum are exposed. This article seeks to investigate the South African high school History curriculum to indicate the deficiencies embedded in it that reveal its incomplete nature in the study of History. Peoples differentiated by race, ethnicity, class, gender and generation have different access to power and therefore different relations with the environment. As W Cronon notes, Environmental History should seek to “probe the level of the group to explore the implication of social division”.<sup>12</sup> The study of the environment should not be relegated only to Science and Geography as has been effected in the United State of America<sup>13</sup>, Australia<sup>14</sup> and Britain<sup>15</sup> where environmental studies have been taught. It has been based on nature, outdoor studies, and conservation studies with the purpose of encouraging learners to appreciate the natural environmental world through first hand observation. Environmental studies in Science and Geography focus on developing knowledge skills and awareness regarding natural resources and their management.<sup>16</sup> The foci of such disciplines and their conservation ideologies favour middle class and liberal democratic values and ignore urban and poor class environmental problems and ideologies in which the majority of people lived.<sup>17</sup> Thus there is a need for Socio-Environmental History in schools. There has been a discrepancy in the manner in which the History curriculum has been constructed as it excluded the most important aspect of Social History which is Socio-Environmental studies. The focus on how diverse communities engaged with the environment

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11 See B William, “Environmental degradation in South Africa” (Paper, 15<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Society, Rhodes University Grahamstown, 2-3 July 1995); F Khan, “Contemporary South African environmental response: An historical and socio-political evaluations with particular reference to blacks” (MA, UCT, 1990); S Swart, “The ant of the white soul: Popular natural history, the politics of Afrikaner identity, and the entomological writings of Eugene Marais”; W Beinart & J McGregor (Eds.), *Social history and African environments* (Oxford, James Currey, 2003), pp. 221-239; L van Sittert, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it: Comparing fisheries reforms in South Africa” (UCT, Department of Historical Studies 2002); L van Sittert, “Making the Cape floral kingdom: The discovery and defence of indigenous flora at the Cape ca. 1890-1939”, *Landscape Research*, 28(1), 2003, pp. 113-129.

12 W Cronon, “Modes of prophecy and production...”, *The Journal of American History*, 76, 1990, p. 1129.

13 WB Stapp, “Historical setting of environmental education”, JA Swan & WB Stapp (Eds.), *Environmental education: Strategies towards a more liable future* (New York, Sage, 1974).

14 A Reid, “The essence of environmental education”, *Australian Association for Environmental Education Newsletter*, 1, 1980, pp. 3-6.

15 K Wheeler, “The genesis of environmental education”, GC Martin & K Wheeler, (Eds.), *Insights into environmental education* (Edinburgh, Oliver Boyd, 1975).

16 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education and the challenge of environmental problems* (Paris, UNESCO, 1977).

17 K Wheeler, “The genesis...”, GC Martin & K Wheeler, (Eds.), *Insights...* (Edinburgh, Oliver Boyd, 1975), p. 14.

from the past is not part of the Science disciplines objectives. History has to take charge of its role as stipulated in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) of 2011, Further Education and Training grade 10-12 that: “The study of history also supports citizenship within a democracy by: ... Encouraging the civic responsibility and responsible leadership, including raising current social and environmental concerns”.<sup>18</sup>

Hence this article advocates that Socio-Environmental History must be incorporated into the history curriculum as it will assist in meeting the objectives of teaching History; those of helping citizens to engage in collaboration towards the common good.<sup>19</sup> In this instance in curbing the downfall of our societies even universally we must allow students to participate actively in environmental improvement.

The approach in this article has followed N Jacobs’ example, that in order to draw South Africa into broader international debates about the relationship between power and the environment, questions of local modes of land use and rural knowledge, as well as, the notion of environmental justice have to be investigated. In this instance high school curricula must include such environmental concepts in the official History syllabus. In drawing on the work of D Worster, W Cronon, N Jacobs and others, this article moves from the understanding that the environment does not just represent an historical backdrop, but is an agent in its own right, providing a “material base for the power to dominate others” as well as the “power to endure domination”.<sup>20</sup> Also using D Worster’s approach that; Environmental History must function on three levels: “first, the reconstruction of past environmental conditions, second, ecological implications of production, including technological and social considerations, third, the human perception of the environment”. For emphasis, C Merchant provides the fourth approach: “the reproduction between production and consciousness”.<sup>21</sup> Thus the approach will be the socio-environmental genre drawing from the Africanist<sup>22</sup> paradigm that takes the indigenous knowledge system as important in its own accord. The Africanist approach attempts to assert the importance of Africans in the making of history. In this article the genre is relevant as it demystifies the Socio-Environmental History of Africans from their own perspectives and

18 Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa (2011), *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS): Further Education and Training phase 10-12*, 2011, p. 8.

19 KC Barton & LS Levstik, *Teaching history for the common good* (Routledge, 2013).

20 N Jacobs, *Environment, power and injustice: A South African History* (Cambridge, University Press, 2003), p. 219.

21 N Jacobs, *Environment, power and injustice...*, p. 21.

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

shows that they also played an important part in the making of their own history.

While this article does not wish to neglect the weight of political, economic and social factors in the History curriculum, it argues that, ignoring Socio-Environmental studies will lead to the production of learners who have no understanding or even appreciation of how socio-economic and political events have impacted on and been impacted by the environment.

### **South African history curriculum: Incomplete?**

The South African History curriculum purports to ensure that it promotes human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice through content and context chosen for the syllabus.<sup>23</sup> It also mentions the importance of valuing indigenous knowledge systems: by acknowledging the rich history and heritage of South Africa as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the constitution. A scrutiny of the high school History syllabus content reveals there is lack of such knowledge systems, and if any, the emphasis is mainly on Western ideologies. Hence MA Crew argues that, “democracy is let down by incomplete curriculums”.<sup>24</sup>

To promote indigenous knowledge systems the continuous assessment task in grade 10 on heritage or oral History can be achieved using the topic of Myth of Origin and environmental ideologies as an analogy. Myths among the Sotho-Tswana are entrenched in stories, poems, parables, songs and idioms. They illuminate what is “truly human and can also propagate an apparently naïve view of human aspiration and human destiny”.<sup>25</sup> Myths constitute education in terms of morality, ethics, environment and creation. J Waardenburg argues that through myths “world and life can be seen in their real nature. Profound truth is communicated in the form of a story”, and that “in myths what is authentic is not the details of the story itself but the deeper meanings which become present to both teller and listener only in the act of telling”.<sup>26</sup> It implies that people are able to express their understanding of reality not only through stories but also through rituals, actions and gestures.

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23 Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement...*, p. 5.

24 MA Crew, “The failure of the National Curriculum: The Telegraph”, 2009 (available at: [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk) >comment< letters, as accessed on 3 September 2013).

25 B Lornergan, “Reality, myth, symbol”, A Olson (Ed.), *Myth, symbol and reality* (Notre Dame & London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), p. 3.

26 J Waardenburg, “Symbolic aspects of myth”, AM Olson (Ed.), *Myth, symbol and reality* (University of Notre Dame and London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), p. 53.

There has been much disagreement over the authenticity of myth in terms of historicity, with historians and anthropologists such as Raglan arguing that myths are simply untrue historically.<sup>27</sup> Arguments like these obscure what is perhaps the central aim of myth in all cultures: being a teaching tool for past, present and future generations. This means that myth has history in itself and gives people a sense of identity and direction.<sup>28</sup>

The indigenous peoples' myths of origin differ from one group to another. The southern Sotho group believe that the first people emerged from the "bed of reeds" in Ntsoana Tsatsi, a hill in the eastern Orange Free State.<sup>29</sup> According to FD Ellenberger, a missionary in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, T Abbouset of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society visited this place in 1836 and confirmed that the Basotho legend identifies a cave surrounded by marshes and reeds from which they believe themselves to have emerged.<sup>30</sup> This place is a heritage site and the syllabus can include such a study to strengthen environmental awareness in students that it has been part of pre-colonial Africa. The myth has environmental significance because it illustrates to the community that plants are important and are related to humanity, and thus have to be treated with respect. Another myth of origin held by the Sotho-Tswana maintains that they emerged from "the hole in the ground".<sup>31</sup> It states that men, women, children and their livestock emerged together from the hole. The Batswana locate the hole at Ga-Ditshweni (the Place of the Baboons) in Bophuthatswana, at Ga-Loowe in Botswana and near Orangeville in the eastern Orange Free State.<sup>32</sup> Some claim that there is evidence of humanity's origin in such places because there are footprints of people, animals and a one-legged person in the rocks. The large one-legged footprint, according to the Sotho-Tswana, was that of Loowe, the agent of God (*Modimo*). The myth of the "hole in the ground" was widely held even into the 1970s by the older generation<sup>33</sup> and is still prevalent today, especially

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27 G Schrempf, "Introduction", G Schrempf & W Hansen (Eds.), *Myth: A new symposium* (Bloomington, and Indiana Polis, Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 3.

28 Wiesel (1990) cited in G Schrempf, "Introduction", G Schrempf & W Hansen (Eds.), *Myth: A new...*.

29 The myth of origin from the "reeds" as held by the Sotho-Tswana is similar to the Nguni group but most could not locate the actual place as the southern Sotho's did. Members of the amaZulu still celebrate the myth by organizing *ublanga* (reeds) dance once a year where women and men will carry reeds parading and dancing. Such a celebration is a symbol of commemorating their Zulu culture and origin. Cited in G Setiloane, *African theology: An introduction* (Johannesburg, Braamfontein, Skotaville Publishers 1985), p. 6; AT Bryant, *The Zulu people* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1949), p. 27.

30 FD Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto ancient and modern* (New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 18.

31 G Setiloane, *African theology...*, p. 7.

32 G Setiloane, *African theology...*, pp. 7-8.

33 G Setiloane, *African theology...*, pp. 6-7.

among those practicing African culture<sup>34</sup>. The importance of the myth is that it teaches people the significance of communal unity because it states that people and animals emerged from the ground simultaneously. Animals are accorded great respect and the Sotho-Tswana use some as totems or cultural emblems, which is an environmental didactic device that teaches people to care for animals and to avoid abusing them or adding to their depletion. The site of origin in the “ground” is also important environmentally as it indicates the importance of the earth as “mother” because it gives birth to people and accommodates the dead.

Such memory and oral history is rich and cannot be left untold to the current and future generations. It is CAPS that explains history as a study that enables us to understand how past human action affects the present and influences our future, and allows us to evaluate these effects. Such history is rich and can assist in ensuring that the nation’s environmental problems are carried by all citizens as they all learn about them from different contexts. But, unfortunately the curriculum is incomplete as it has a missing link in that it theoretically promotes environmentalism but practically in its syllabus content outline of themes such concepts as environmentalism and indigenous knowledge are lacking. The CAPS document emphasizes issues of environmentalism including conservation, which are universally important in helping any nation not to fall, as Jared David has attested, however the curriculum entails little if any related issues such as how historically the environment was conserved.<sup>35</sup>

### ***South African history curriculum and socio-environmental history***

The debates in History teaching have ignored the socio-environmental importance of history till of late. This is because schools “historically were not intended to develop critical thinkers, social inquirers and problem solvers, or active participants in environmental and political (or even educational) decision making”.<sup>36</sup> This view shows clearly that our History curriculum by omitting environment as its theme lacks the core primary concept of history. For this article Socio-Environmental History would focus on highlighting the importance of human agency in shaping their environment. It will also

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34 There is one religion “African Traditional Religion” but different cultural and traditions are embedded therein. Like Christianity, it is one religion but contains different practices and doctrines.

35 Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement...*, pp. 5 & 8.

36 RB Stevenson, “Schooling and environmental education...”, *Environmental Education Research*, 13(2), 2007, pp. 139-153.



assist in improving the quality of life of all human kind in our universe regardless of gender, race and class while finding ways to ensure that no nation should grow or develop at the expense of another and that the consumption of no individual should be increased at the expense of the other individual. Educational sociologists have described the role of the contemporary schools as being that of transmitting cultural knowledge, skills and values. The problem in industrialised countries is the diverse cultures and there must be a choice of which culture to adhere to. According to W Apple these choices between the diverse cultures are mainstream or dominant beliefs, values and norms shared by those who have political power in society.<sup>37</sup> South Africa purports to be a multicultural country which implies that over and above the western cultural context it embraces it must also practically assimilate all beliefs including African culture in curriculum planning. As CAPS states that “the study of history supports the citizenship within the democracy of South Africa by upholding the values of the constitution and helping people to understand such values”.<sup>38</sup>

The roots of South Africa’s past have pivoted on issues surrounding the environment, land and the plans regarding land use. The CAPS grade 10-12 document in Section 2 number 2.1 also shows the importance of history in that regard by mentioning that: “the study of history has to encourage civic responsibility and responsible leadership, including raising current social and environmental concerns” but the syllabus does not live up to the aims set there in, because nowhere in the syllabus content are environmental issues prescribed. South African history has included land and environmental issues and by excluding the concept it is truly not living up to what CAPS purports. In this country since 1652 when Jan Van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape of Good Hope 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>39</sup> As a result land dispossession was executed on the basis of environmental racial apartheid and discrimination. The powerful white colonialists drew strength from its 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, race or even gender).<sup>40</sup> The British colonial

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37 W Apple, *Ideology and curriculum* (London, Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1979).

38 Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement...*, p. 8.

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

40 N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice...*, p. 4.



state and its successors the National Party continued to entrench oppressive systems that drastically restricted African access to land and defined it from the white settler social context which is also part of the syllabus perspective – western in approach. As a result environmental discrimination occurred and many indigenous people of South Africa veered towards being apathetic about environmental issues; illustrated in many case studies such as Lady Selborne, District Six and Cato Manor. This is a cause for concern for the education system to ensure that the environment also forms part of the core concepts used in History. Environment, many will say belongs to Geography but fail to understand that, “the cognitive study of learning and instruction in History, as with the cognitive study of virtually any subject matter domain, tends to focus on how the particular subject matter is acquired and how individual reason within the context of that domain”.<sup>41</sup>

Socio-Environmental education (History - my emphasis) is also important because it is concerned with social, political, economic and cultural upliftment of communities in terms of ensuring justice in a holistic way. It is also concerned with measures and strategies of dealing with environmental exploitation. However, there are challenges to Socio-Environmental History objectives that encourage communities to be active players within their environments as they undermine social stability by creating conflict, since they challenge the dominant interests and offer different value systems.<sup>42</sup>

The adoption of the environment as a primary concept in the History curriculum tallies with the democratic, nation building and skills empowerment advocated – by the new CAPS. It advocates learning that is holistic and co-operative and the mastery of knowledge and skills in the Environmental History is demonstrated by students’ actions in real situations whereby they make decisions on environmental issues rather than only writing essays and engaging in oral presentations.<sup>43</sup> By incorporating environment as a theme, the History syllabus will aid in the reusable past of history as a tool in shaping the collective mind as the environment is the soul of the nation. The Sotho-Tswana say it is “lefa” – inheritance. It will be a quantum leap of direct intervention in ensuring that the History syllabus breaks out of the narrow nationalistic straight jacket in which it has lived for so long. This

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41 JF Voss & M Carretero, “Introduction”, JF Voss & M Carretero (Ed.), *Learning and reasoning in History* (London, Portland, OR Woburn Press, 1998), pp. 1-5.

42 RB Stevenson, “Schooling and environmental education...”, *Environmental Education Research*, 13(2), 2007, p. 145.

43 RB Stevenson, “Schooling and environmental education...”, *Environmental Education Research*, 13(2), 2007, p. 147.

concur with G Partington's criteria of historical significance because indeed Environmental History covers the five aspects of what he terms as important in History.

- Importance - to the people living at the time
- Profundity - how deeply people's lives have been affected
- Quantity - how many lives have been affected
- Durability - for how long have people's lives been affected
- Relevance- in terms of the increased understanding of present life.<sup>44</sup>

Thus Socio-Environmental History is of historical importance as it affects all societies on a daily basis and many unfortunate people die due to environmental tragedies. Traditionally History textbooks and the curriculum per se have carried an implicit message that historical significance should be ascribed to white, middle and upper class males in positions of power or authority and the exclusion of important national history has occurred. Nowadays with greater recognition of nation building and democratic principles the South African History curriculum embraces the previously marginalised, women and the other racial groups who are non-white but historical significance remains highly problematic. Studies by KC Barton & LC Levstik<sup>45</sup> indicate that the concept of historical significance is shifting and continues to be contested. As S Levesque has argued that it is because "teachers, students, and people in general, no less than historians, confront the study of the past with their own mental framework of historical significance shaped by their particular cultural and linguistic heritage, family practices, popular culture influence, and last, but not least, school history experience".<sup>46</sup> Themes such as conflict over land have been a major problem in South Africa as many people were forcibly removed from their land due to racial discrimination during the colonial and apartheid periods which impacted negatively on environmental issues in the country and can now be studied and included in the curriculum as is exemplified in this article. In the twentieth century, the 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

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<sup>44</sup> G Partington, *The idea of an historical education* (Slough, NFER, 1980), pp. 112-116.

<sup>45</sup> KC Barton & LS Levstik, "It wasn't a good part of History", National identity and students' explanations of historical significance", *Teachers College Record*, 99(4), 1998, pp. 478-513.

<sup>46</sup> S Levesque, "Teaching second-order concepts in Canadian history: The importance of historical significance", *Canadian Social Studies*, 39(2), 2005, p. 1.

had been 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 of such resettlement areas are environmentally degraded due to the impact of forced removals.

### **Environmental history in practice for a high school curriculum: The case study of Lady Selborne’s forced removals**

Lady Selborne (currently known as Suiderberg) was home to many indigenous people who were displaced due to the Group Areas Act of 1950 with some relocated to Ga-Rankuwa. The focal group chiefly chosen are 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 Coloreds, 97 Whites, 6 Indians and 5 Vendas in Lady Selborne.<sup>47</sup> The Sotho-Tswana ascribed the land with a 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 from ancestors to be preserved for the future generations. Land was perceived as a home for the living, the dead, animals and plants and these components had to live co-operatively to ensure a sustainable life for all. Subsequently if one component failed to co-exist with the others, it would mean a disturbance of the entire cultural, social and ecosystem of the Sotho-Tswana and would lead to disaster, either natural or social.<sup>48</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>49</sup> This implies that in African culture and tradition certain people, places, 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

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

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

49 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.

in any detail” and this poses the problem with which this article wrestles.<sup>50</sup> This article suggests that the ideology of land for indigenous Africans has deep meaning as it is enmeshed in religious rites and beliefs. The environment and our anthropogenic engagement with it play a major and changing role in this ideology of our engagement with it and require delineation. Changing ideas about respect for land, 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.

The history of forced removals has been studied from different aspects (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 and that is the socio-environmental aspect of land dispossession.<sup>51</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 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 *hlompo* (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>52</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 political and environmental brief***

Lady Selborne was located against the south slope of the Magaliesberg some sixteen kilometres northwest of Pretoria's city centre. It was established

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50 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.

51 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, 2008, pp. 70-97.

52 F Khan, “Contemporary South African environmental response: ...”, p. 15.

in 1905 as a township where black Africans could own land.<sup>53</sup> Land was available to different racial groups in the township, including black Africans seeking work and accommodation. In other words all races could own land in Lady Selborne. The area was surrounded by some white settlements such as Daspoort, Hercules and Innesdale,<sup>54</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>55</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 Selborne as “practically a location”.<sup>56</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>57</sup>

Through the policy of Forced removals the National Party government implemented rigorous evictions of the community of Lady Selborne through the passing of the Group Areas Act of 1950 which officially paved the way to land dispossession in Lady Selborne. A letter dated 12 November 1949 from the provincial secretary of the Transvaal province to the secretary for finance clearly illustrates this desire to destroy Lady Selborne with an eye on “controlling the area”.<sup>58</sup> Lady Selborne as a township grew and was later that year incorporated into the city of Pretoria with 1952 registered properties.<sup>59</sup> J 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>60</sup> The residents continued to complain about high rates and underdevelopment but were ignored by the Hercules town council. Property prices were inflated: about £500 per

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53 Central Archives (CA), Pretoria, Transvaal Education Department (TES), Reference 4134: Report of the Departmental Committee, “Statement embodying particulars and survey of the affairs of Lady Selborne”, 1949, p. 61.

54 CA, TES, Reference 4134: Report of the Departmental Committee, Statement embodying particulars and survey of the affairs of Lady Selborne, 1949, p. 61.

55 See J Carruthers, “Urban land claims in South Africa...” *Kleio*, XXX11, 2000, p. 26.

56 Transvaal Archives (TA), Pretoria, Governor of the Transvaal Colony (GOV), Reference 828/PS17/65/05: Letter, Le Fleur (land buyer)/Lord Selborne (Government official), 21 November 1905.

57 TA, Pretoria, GOV, Reference 828/PS17/65/05, Letter, Le Fleur/Lord Selborne, 22 November 1905.

58 CATES, Reference 3900 F19/269: Letter, Provincial Secretary/Secretary for Finance, 12 November 1949.

59 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).

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

stand in order to prevent more blacks from buying plots in the area while the neighbouring white areas plots were lower: around £90 to £250.<sup>61</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>62</sup> Its argument was essentially that the area was a “Black Spot”, unwanted so close to whites.<sup>63</sup>

By 1956 the Pretoria City Council finally decided to destroy Lady Selborne but needed a firm Act to support this aim.<sup>64</sup> The council’s frustrations stemmed from the fact that no rezoning of Pretoria could be implemented without Lady 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>65</sup> Removals of residents started in November 1961 by the police.

Interviews were conducted by the author, assisted by Dr. Sibusiso Masondo; a Lecturer at the University of Cape Town who assisted with the transcribing. The field-work was conducted over a period of one year from June 2004, again in March and April 2006 and lastly in September 2006 in Ga-Rankuwa, mainly among the Sotho-Tswana who were displaced from Lady Selborne between 1960 and 1969. The number chosen was determined by the availability of individuals. The criteria used in choosing informants was that they had to be people who were actively involved in forced removals and had knowledge about Lady Selborne and Ga-Rankuwa. The above criteria limited numbers as most people who were involved had died. The number of people interviewed were all men and women over the age of 45. The residents of Lady Selborne were attached to each other and their environment.<sup>66</sup> The local sense of identity was able to cut across religious, cultural, racial and class

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61 CA, TES, 4134, Report of the Departmental Committee Statement embodying particulars and survey of the affairs of Lady Selborne, 1949, p. 62.

62 CA TES, 4134, Report of the Departmental Committee Statement embodying particulars and survey of the affairs of Lady Selborne, 1949, p. 64.

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

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

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

66 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.



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 interdependence on one another as a community.

The State alienated the community of Lady Selborne from their environment by reducing access to land and water,<sup>67</sup> and used “scientific” conservation policies to limit both by introducing high bond rates as a measure for preventing 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 managing of their area through the health and village committees which were not very successful because all the power rested within the Hercules Town Council. People were made more politically aware and active through health and village 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.

Success in community mobilisation in fighting against high rates 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 forced to construct a new history while 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 Seborne, Bantule, Newclare, Marabastad, Rama, Eastwood and other neighbouring farms. The area was named after the Bakgatla headman, Rankuwa Boikhutso. “Rankuwa” means “we are accepted”. Then 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 as well as the under resourced conditions of the area.

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<sup>67</sup> J Carruthers, “Urban land claims in South Africa...”, *Kleio*, XXXII, 2000, pp. 28-29.



The area was proclaimed a township by Proclamation 448 of 1965 and was allowed to accommodate Africans from diverse ethnic groups including the amaNguni, Vendas and Shangaans.<sup>68</sup>

Those who 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 saw 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 which was their inborn belief and philosophy of life was disrupted and arrested through the loss of land. Those resettled became apathetic towards the environment, were reduced to dependency and existed in a state of feeling “less human” called *sefifi* (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. This was a mental state of mind of displaying their resistance of their new settlement. Hence Zwingman argues that:<sup>69</sup>

*When life is threatened the reaction is physical but where total loss of love is involved the reaction is mental. People suffering from “uprootal” 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 that for some of the interviewees the new area would always be

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68 CA, Department of Bantu Administration and Development (BAO), Reference 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.

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

the “other place” and not “home”.<sup>70</sup> The concept of “home”<sup>71</sup> was dynamic from immovable to movable ‘home’ hence some residents began 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>72</sup> Land restitution also is an illustration of this. When asked about whether the former landlords wanted 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>73</sup> Though there were problems such as the absence of running water and a proper sewerage system, the residents were largely content and in the beginning did not pay high rates at.<sup>74</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 it controlled the amount of water to be used as compared to the wells where they could utilise water the way they wanted.<sup>75</sup> There were also environmental power issues that undermined unity in the township. Many former tenant interviewees displayed dissatisfaction towards this class-stratification.<sup>76</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>77</sup> According to N Jacobs, the issue of

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70 MC Kgari-Masondo, Interview, T Tshweni, 28 June 2004, Andrew (Secretary, Pretoria Municipality), 28 June 2004 and M Manamela, 30 June 2004.

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

72 N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice...*, p. 208.

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

74 MC Kgari-Masondo, Interview, R Kgari, 25 June 2004.

75 MC Kgari-Masondo, Interview, Sekhu, 28 June 2004.

76 MC Kgari-Masondo, 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.

77 MC Kgari-Masondo, Interview, M Madumo, 30 June 2004.

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>78</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 that needed assistance.<sup>79</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>80</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 humanity 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 nots” as a symbol of solidarity with their former tenants in order to fight displacement.

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>81</sup> More so the relocation area came with its environmental injustice and historical rupture.

### ***Ramifications of forced removals***

According to B Bozzoli “the roots of our present system of exploitation and oppression have had to be sought and exposed through re-examination of the past”.<sup>82</sup> This implies that, the idea that the environmental problems that plague Ga-Rankuwa can be traced back to its history. Harris states “to be open

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

79 MC Kgari-Masondo, Interview, R Kgari, 25 June 2004.

80 Cited in 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.

81 MC Kgari-Masondo, 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.

82 B Bozzoli, “History, experience and culture”, B Bozzoli (Ed.), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal* (Braamfontein, Ravan Press, 1983), p. 1.

to the past is, simply, to be open to the roots of what we are, the past is the contrast and perspective for the present”.<sup>83</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 the historical socio-environmental perspective with an Afrocentric approach have been used, which 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>84</sup> while some scholars have gone beyond the social sphere and focused on the environmental impact.<sup>85</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.

The rights denied the residents of Ga-Rankuwa include 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 argues that the present situation of poverty is a legacy of apartheid policies that violated black people’s rights to enjoy a better life.<sup>86</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 right to own land.<sup>87</sup> 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>88</sup>

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83 Cited in F Khan, “Contemporary South African environmental response...”, p. 3.

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

85 N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice...*

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

87 MLM Mbaob, “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. 90.

88 MC Kgari-Masondo, Interview, I Mvula, 24 June 2004, R Kgari, 25 June 2004, J Motshetshane (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, J Kekana (Entrepreneur, Ga-Rankuwa), 29 June 2004, 1 July 2004.

This explains why ideologically “nature” for the Sotho-Tswana is not an object for human exploitation but exists in a dialogue with humans.<sup>89</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 fuel source indicates some depletion of firewood. This is due to romanticism of the past by interviewees, which ignores the coexistence of capitalism along with traditional ideology. Hence Jacobs proposes that:<sup>90</sup>

*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.*

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>91</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>92</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 J 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>93</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 begin new lives, histories and friendships in

89 GM Setiloane, *African theology...*, p. 40.

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

91 MC Kgari-Masondo, Interview, I Mvula, 24 June 2004, T Tshweni, 28 June 2004 and M Manamela, 29 June 2004.

92 MC Kgari-Masondo, 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, J Kekana, 29 June 2004, 1 July 2004.

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

Ga-Rankuwa, where environmental resources were poor.

## **Conclusions**

The state has to ensure that the History curriculum in South African high schools embraces all cultures as it purports to be a democratically aligned education system. It has to embrace the ethic of the usable past as History is the study of the past and present based on evidence, studied to assist communities not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Thus, History has to include pivotal themes such as the environment as it has been illustrated in this study through the case study of forced removals of the former residents of Lady Selborne who were relocated in Ga-Rankuwa. The article argued that to preserve and ensure environmental renaissance in black areas the state has to recognise and involve participation of diverse communities in environmental issues 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. The first crucial step as this article has proposed is the adoption of Socio-Environmental History as part of the History curriculum. 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 again be faced with unfair state intervention.<sup>94</sup> This implies that South Africans need to build not only new societal relationships but also new relationships with their environment.<sup>95</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 and through History teaching this will be a positive step towards environmental improvement in South Africa.<sup>96</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 area's environment. Some residents adopted passive resistance, characterised by non-participation in environmental issues, because they felt aggrieved by displacement. 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

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<sup>94</sup> N Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice...*, p. 221.

<sup>95</sup> S Horstmeier & S Cornelissen, "The social and political construction of identities...", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40(1), 2002, p. 56.

<sup>96</sup> MLM Mbaio, "Undoing the injustices of the past...", *Journal for Judicial Science*, 27(2), 2002, p. 91.



achieve this.

This study argues that environmental scholars have dealt with the issue of environmental activism but not within a historical context and also not proposing for it to be part of the History school curriculum. The key to inculcating environmental activism has been through education programmes and the eradication of the legacy of apartheid.<sup>97</sup> The drawback of such a proposal is that it fails 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 high 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 useable 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. By introducing environmental education in the History curriculum learners will be able to understand how segregationist policies and forced removals 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 in the early 1960s. Illustrating how segregationist and apartheid land-related Acts led to displacements and exposed blacks to a vicious cycle of poverty and destruction of cultural and economic systems. This theme will also tally with an explanation of causes and consequences that the effects are still visible even

97 F Khan, Contemporary South African environmental response...



in the landscape of South Africa. Further participatory research on Socio-Environmental History and the History curriculum would, however, need to move beyond identification of the significance of the integration of the primary concept of environment in history to researching other themes currently in the History curriculum and attempt to tease out the environmental aspects of the subjects.