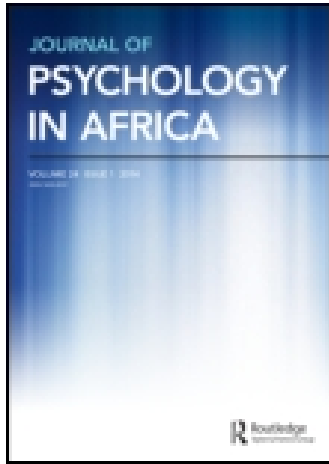


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"...Here We Help Each Other": Sense of Community of People Subjected to Forced Removals

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“... Here We Help Each Other”: Sense of Community of People Subjected to Forced Removals

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This study examined the sense of community of people with experience of forced removals in a South African setting. The participants were 200 – 108 men (54%) and 92 women (46%) between 18 and 61 years of age and selected using systematic random sampling from the Khuma community. Data were collected using a Sense of Community Index-2 and the Mmogo-method®, a visual representation procedure. The questionnaire data were statistically analysed and the qualitative data were thematically and visually analysed. Findings suggested that places were important to sense of community in meeting their needs for survival, to maintain intergenerational relationships, and to facilitate community interactions.

Key words: needs, sense of place/community, voluntary/forced removal, interactions, relationships

Sense of community is characterized by interdependence and mutual commitment of group members to the development of a community (Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop 2002; Sarason, 1974). According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), sense of community has four dimensions: membership, influence, meeting needs and shared emotional connection. Membership refers to a community's experiences of belonging, and influence refers to the perception of community members that they can have a say in the decisions affecting their lives. The meeting of needs refers to physical, emotional and relational needs and a shared emotional connection is found in people who share a common history, interests, beliefs and a social support network, particularly when they have to deal with challenges such as forced removals (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Obst & White, 2005; Sonn & Fisher, 1996). This study explored the four dimensions of sense of community and the relationship between people and places in an African township where forced removals had taken place.

Interdependency of Relationships

The attachment that community members have to their community develops from their interdependent relationships with one another and is expressed as an identification with the community and a commitment to the survival and promotion of the community (Chavis & Pretty, 1999; Hughey & Speer, 2002; Sarason, 1974; Townley, Kloos, Green, & Franco, 2011). A sense of community does not develop in a social vacuum but is, rather, situated in a specific environment (Trickett, 1996). In an African context, black people's sense of community is embedded in a relationship with the environment, between people, with Divine Realities/Divinities and the non-living (Chilisa, 2012; Mbiti, 1969). In the case of forced removals, the physical relocations have implications for all the relational connections of the people concerned.

South Africa is defined and characterised by a history of conflict and large-scale population removals (Freund, 1984; Omari & Macaringue, 2007). Between the 1950s and the early

1990s, many black South Africans were forcibly removed from their ancestral land to locations near towns (Bennet, 2005; Christopher, 1997). Forced removal means cutting people off from their places of heritage, their homes, their culture and their communities (Bowman, Duncan & Sonn, 2010; Kolobe & Roos, 2012). It is a destructive process with physical and emotional consequences due to loss, separation and feelings of helplessness (Ferreira & Van Dongen, 2004). In African society, land is highly valued and is regarded as gift which is transferred intergenerationally (Oosthuizen & Molokoe, 2002). Relocating African people therefore has serious implications for their adjustment in the new context (Kolobe & Roos, 2012; Oosthuizen & Molokoe, 2002). The impact of forced relocation, especially in respect of public housing and urban renewal programmes, has been widely documented in the international literature (Hall, 1996). Numerous South African studies also reveal the negative impact of forced removals on communities during apartheid (Kamish, 2008).

The aims of this study were to determine the sense of community (SOC) of a community that was forcibly removed and to explore the meanings of important places identified by community members. The following questions guided the study: 1) What is the sense of community in a particular black community that was forcibly removed from Makweteng to Khuma? 2) How were meanings of important places described by this community?

Method

Research Context and Participants

The location for study is a former mining town in the North West Province in South Africa. The settlement was founded by a group of residents who in 1956-1957 relocated voluntarily from Makweteng to Khuma. The group that remained in Makweteng was forcibly removed to Khuma, the study location, in 1958-1959 in terms of apartheid legislation.

A sample of 200 participants (aged 18 - 61 years, 46% female and 54% men) was drawn from the location households using a systematic sampling procedure and completed the Sense of Community Index-2. Ten participants (two women and eight men) with ages ranging from 23 to 83 years accepted the invitation to identify important places in the town they had been relocated to (Khuma) and to indicate the meaning of the places to them by participating in the Mmogo-method® (Roos, 2008; 2012). The participants included Setswana-, Sotho- and Xhosa-speaking people. All of the participants had been residents of the town for more than ten years – most of them from its founding date.

Procedure and Data Collection

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University. Participants were informed about the research and told that their participation was voluntary. They were also informed that there were no foreseeable risks and that they could withdraw from the research at any stage.

Participants completed the Sense of Community Index-2 (SCI-2 McMillan & Chavis's, 1986) that measures for aspects of sense of community: membership, influence, meeting needs and shared emotional connection. A Cronbach alpha coefficient of .94 was observed in this study.

The Mmogo-method® is a participatory research method to obtain the participants subjective meanings in relation to places that are regarded as important. The Mmogo-method® used an open-ended prompt to stimulate the participants to create visual representations.

Using all the objects in front of you, please make a visual representation of anything that comes to your mind when you think of important places in your community that you want to see existing in the future for your children.

The textual data obtained from the explanations of the participants of their visual representations and the focus discussions were thematically analysed, and paragraphs, sentences and words were coded in relation to the topic in order to discover new meanings and determine themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The visual representations were analysed by asking the participants what they have made; to complement their explanations by the rest of the group's interpretations and to link their explanations with the open-ended request. Thereafter, researchers analysed the visual representations in terms of the objects that were made, the relationship between the objects as well as interpreting the meanings within the broader socio-political and cultural environments.

The trustworthiness of the qualitative research findings was ensured through the inclusion of multiple data gathering methods. The researchers also kept field notes of their experience of the research process, their observations and their assumptions, which helped make them aware of their own ideas on the topic. Throughout the research process, the researchers reflected on how their perceptions might influence the findings.

Findings

The findings are represented Table 1.

Dimensions of Sense of Community

Needs perceived to be met by the community included reinforcement of the needs, membership, and shared emotional connection. Reinforcement of needs refers to a community of Khuma where people confirmed one another in terms of shared

values, priorities and goals. The Khuma community described membership as feelings of belonging and safety and although some of the participants thought they had no influence over their community, most of them believed that if there was a problem in the community, they would be able to solve the problem themselves. Shared emotional connection refers to community members in this community who shared a history and other local events. The participants also seemed to be committed to the development of their community as most of them considered it important to live in the particular community.

Places are Important to Maintain Intergenerational Relations

Places were important to the community because it was used to maintain intergenerational relations by sharing information with the younger generations or by performing rituals for the living dead. For instance, some of the participants suggested the building of a museum: *Our children need to know how the mines started and why the hostels are built (Participant 3). We also have our traditional clothes and food, ways of living. Our children need to know all these things (Participant 4).* Also it is a very unique thing for our youth to learn how we, as parents grow, how we fetch water in a traditional well, and we like them to learn about this (Participant 1).

Certain places are important because of the significant relationship with the living-dead. *We still go to Makweteng for our traditional rituals, we also go there bury the dead. Our forefathers were buried there as well, so this place is very important to us (Participant 10).*

Places Meet People's Needs for Survival

Places were meaningful if they met the needs of employment and sustenance. For example, the participants said the local mine should be re-opened to create employment for young people and attract investment: *If they re-open the mine our location will develop and youth will be employed. The mine will also attract positive investments around here. (Participant 2).*

The participants said that if land were made available, agriculture could be practised and food produced thereby reducing

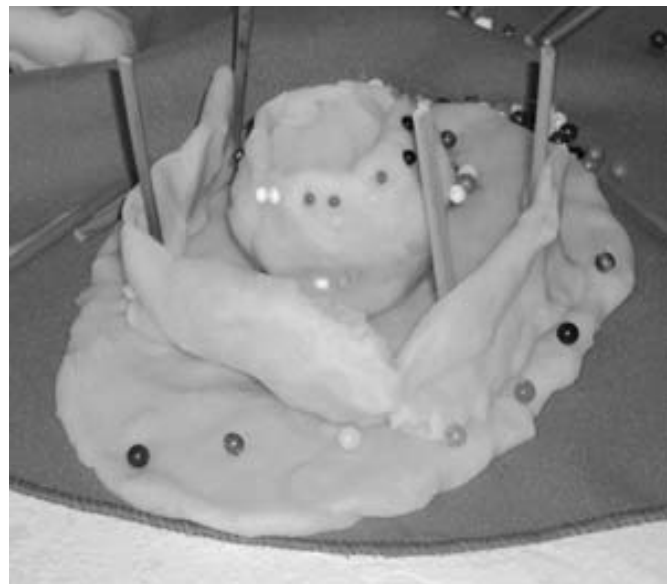


Figure 1. Visual representation of a traditional well

Table 1
Statements about Khuma

Statements	Not at all	Somewhat	Most of the time	All of the time
1. I think Khuma is a good place for me to live.	5%	22%	33%	40%
2. People in Khuma do not share the same values.	9%	32%	34%	25%
3. My neighbours and I want the same things from the community.	16%	18%	41%	25%
4. I can recognise most of the people who live in Khuma.	12%	18%	43%	27%
5. I feel at home in Khuma.	6%	16%	35%	43%
6. Very few of my neighbours know me.	24%	26%	30%	20%
7. I care about what my neighbours think of my actions.	7%	14%	29%	50%
8. I have no influence over what Khuma is like.	28%	32%	25%	15%
9. If there is a problem in Khuma, people who live here can get it solved.	14%	24%	34%	28%
10. It is important to me to live in this particular community.	4%	18%	36%	42%
11. People in Khuma generally do not get along with each other.	9%	43%	17%	31%
12. I expect to live in Khuma for a long time.	32%	15%	14%	39%

Note. Items in bold indicate the highest percentage

unemployment and starvation: *If land could be available in our location where there can be people who will be trained for agricultural purposes. Where they plant spinach and other vegetables then this issue of unemployment can be resolved, it will solve our problems. Starvation is a challenge.*

Places Facilitate Community Interaction

Participants believed places to facilitate community interaction. For instance, the stadium where young people could play different sports and the adults and older people could socialise while watching them; or the swimming pool, which could provide *entertainment as well as sport to the people in the community.*

Discussion

Despite the forced removals, a sense of community was evident in the community of study in terms of their needs being met in the places where they functioned. The needs of the community were expressed to ensure the community's physical needs; to maintain intergenerational relations and to facilitate community interactions. The community's needs were reinforced by their shared history and their emotional connections. The caring for one another underlined the connectedness and interdependency of the community members. Mbiti (1969) and Mkhize (2004) maintain that shared responsibility for one another's needs develops from the interconnectedness between people. Although the community members had to contend with wide-ranging changes, they expressed a sense of control over the environment by proposing the preservation and development of places they considered important in maintaining their sense of community.

Implications for Community Support Programmes

The needs of forced removal victims should be supported by identifying places of importance to them in their current environment and their previous environment from where they were relocated and the subjective meanings the places had for them. Community developers should consider the views of community members before making changes as the members may have a

sense of attachment to some places and want these places to be conserved as part of their heritage.

Conclusion

A strong sense of community contributes to a sense of place and vice versa. Places are frames that enable or disable the satisfaction of needs of community members. Places contribute to the fulfillment of needs of people and in shaping a sense of community, especially in cases where communities have to contend with the negative effects of forced removals. A sense of community is promoted by the effective expression of communities' needs for survival, maintaining intergenerational relations as well as community connections, which act as a buffer against adversities. A sense of community is supported by the reinforcement of needs and a shared history and values.

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