(Re)creating community: Experiences of Older Women Forcibly Relocated During Apartheid

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ABSTRACT

This article explores sense of community with a group of older African women, who were forcibly relocated during apartheid. The situation of a marginalised group, with a history of disconnection from younger generations and from place, provides an opportunity to consider the relevance of community in later life. The research was conducted at a day centre for older people in the North West Province of South Africa, more than 50 years after forced relocations took place. Eleven older women (70 years and older) participated. Qualitative data were obtained through visual research methods and group discussions and were thematically analysed. Findings were that place and sense of belonging as well as elements of community were relevant. Participants reported limited connections to place in either childhood or current communities. Post relocation, a sense of belonging was expressed only in relation to a shared-interest community of peers that addressed their needs for safety, emotional support and instrumental care. Also, generational relations were strained, giving rise to a sense of loss of a community where both young and old were responsible for each other. Constrained resource communities have a profound impact on opportunities to create a sense of belonging. © 2013 The Authors. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Key words: ageing in place; forced relocation; generational community; intergenerational relations; older women; shared-interest community; sense of belonging; South Africa

In 2010, research was conducted to develop a framework for the formulation of heritage policies to identify places of importance and their meaning with the aim to protect and preserve them for future generations in rural South Africa. No one identified any place of importance in Ikageng.

In recent years, there has been considerable research and policy effort devoted to increasing the quality of life and social inclusion of older persons. A key focus has been on understanding the role of communities in fostering a sense of well-being and connectedness (Lui, Everingham, Warburton, Cuthill, & Bartlett, 2009; Scharf & Keating, 2012). Communities

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are seen as an important context because much of the day-to-day experience of ageing occurs close to home (Oswald, Jopp, Rott, & Wahl, 2010). The term 'ageing in place' has become a metaphor for the benefits that may accrue to people who grow older in the same location. These include feelings of security and familiarity, sense of identity and maintenance of caring relationships and roles (Erickson, Call, & Brown, 2012; Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve, & Allen, 2012). Kuecker, Mulligan, and Nadarajah (2011) argued that communities offer people a sense of belonging in an unstable world.

Place is particularly important in Africa where land is viewed as an ancestral dwelling and a place of consultation and worship in times of crisis and thanksgiving (Chilisa, 2012; Mbiti, 1969). Thus, the detachment of African people from their land may have more profound implications than the physical rearrangement of people and places, which are common elements of internal migration in many world regions (see, for example, Brown & Glasgow, 2008). The question we address in this paper is what are important elements of community of women growing old in a context of forced relocation and marginalisation, which began more than 50 years ago, under the terms of the South African Group Areas Act? We consider constructs of community in relation to ageing, with findings from a group of older persons for whom neither connection to place nor sense of belonging can be assumed.

Forced relocation

The research literature on forced relocation is infused with themes of trauma, disruption and loss (Nuttman-Shwartz, Dekel, & Tuval-Maschiach (2011). These themes transcend national borders, addressing both national and international relocation, and relocation as a result of a variety of political and cultural events. Forced relocation may occur for a wide variety of reasons: as a result of urban renewal (Goetz, 2013; Lelevrier, 2013); late-life requirements of chronic illness or frailty (Ellis, 2010); or changes to the physical environment such as bush-fires or dam projects (Fairbrother et al., 2013; Yoshida, Rampisela, Solle, & Jayadi, 2012). Doná and Veale (2011) argued that the forced relocation of young people is particularly disruptive given that it often occurs within a political context in which they are often rendered invisible, especially if these are members of culturally excluded groups. Kentridge (2013, p. 135) spoke of 'a common narrative of community un-making that accompanies histories of removals'. There has been little exploration of whether community remaking occurs as part of the long-term impact of forced relocation.

Forced relocation in South Africa. The Group Areas Act of 1950 was conceived and implemented as pillar consequence of the Nationalist Government of South Africa's apartheid ideology. This Act made provision for the division of urban and residential areas into racially segregated zones, on the basis of the forced classification and relocation of people as white, coloured, black or Indian (Bennett, 2005; Turton & Chalmers, 2002). Residents were sometimes moved over an extended period (Kentridge, 2013), more than once, and/or subjected to violence. In some instances, bulldozers were used to flatten their old homes. In the course of the implementation of the Group Areas Act, over one million hectares of land were rezoned according to racial classification, and 3.5 million people were reorganised accordingly (Christopher, 1997).

The implications of the rezoning and reclassification were severe for non-white people: they were assigned to the more rural outskirts of urban areas and had to commute long distances to their workplaces; their land and homes were confiscated or demolished, and they had to relocate to much smaller, substandard dwellings with no provision for infrastructure.

The areas were overcrowded, and a shortage of water, sewerage, food and funds gave rise to numerous socio-economic problems (Ferreira & Van Dongen, 2004; Nkadimeng, 1999). The nature of the relocations contributed to the trauma that the people experienced. Apart from the brutality of the physical removals, families and communities were divided. Some members of the same family were reclassified into different racial groups and thus separated, because they had a lighter or darker skin than the rest of their family (Mazundar, Mazundar, Docuyanan, & McLaughlin, 2000). The people were moved to areas they did not know, often with people whose language they did not speak.

   In the North West province, one of the nine provinces of South Africa, where this research was conducted, people of all racial groups had lived together in an area called Makwateng/ Kloppersville, a suburb of Potchefstroom (at that time). Between 1950 and 1958, as a result of the Groups Areas Act, the non-white people were relocated approximately 10 kilometres (6.2 miles) from Makwateng to racially designated areas: Ikageng for people classified as black, Mohadin for people classified as Indian and Promosa for coloured people. White people remained in the well-developed Makwateng/Kloppersville, which is today called Miederpark. The nature of the removals was traumatic. Those who resisted the relocation were forcibly removed, and their homes were demolished. Some of the children returned home from school to find neither home nor family where they once lived (Oosthuizen & Molokoe, 2002).

Conceptualising community in the context of forced relocation

Any form of relocation disrupts people's engagement with familiar places, their shared history and the identities they have developed collectively and discursively in a particular physical environment. Forced relocations, however, do so in particular ways, ravaging people-place relationships (Devine-Wright, 2009; Goodings, Locke, & Brown, 2007; Nuttman-Shwartz et al., 2011). They have been called 'the most serious forms of externally-imposed psychosocial disruptions and discontinuities' (Fried, 2000, p. 194). Forced relocations had severe implications for people's sense of belonging to place and connectedness to people. It is therefore not surprising that community psychology in the South African context developed as a discipline in the 1960s and 1970s, in response to conditions of political oppression and the glaring racial disparities that came about as a consequence of apartheid (Yen, 2007), because community psychology addresses issues related to social injustice, discrimination and exclusion of people (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

   Community is a complex construct, and researchers use the term to emphasise different dimensions of community depending on their focal research interest (Fairbrother et al., 2013; Foster & Taylor, 2013). Communities of place are bounded by a territorial area in which a person is situated (Pollini, 2005). Such communities are relevant because the physical setting provides the frame wherein people interact and behave. When this frame is changed through relocation, cognitions, affect and behaviour may change as well (Fairbrother et al., 2013; Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2007). Relocation to places with degraded local ecosystems and limited resources has implications for people's well-being and their needs for protection and physical survival (Cramm, Van Dijk, & Nieboer, 2012).

   Psychological conceptions of community emphasise personal connections, including a sense of belonging to a group: where they perceive themselves as similar; where there is familiarity and safety, mutual concern and support; and where needs are satisfied interdependently (Brint, 2001; Fairbrother et al., 2013; Nuttman-Shwartz et al., 2011; Prezza

& Constantini, 1998). Psychological sense of community is an overarching concept in community psychology (Pretty et al., 2007). Its core component is a sense of membership, the subjective feeling of 'being part of' or belonging to (Prezza & Constantini, 1998. p. 182). Membership is enhanced in communities that offer protection and reassurance (Peterson, Speer, & Hughey, 2006; Pretty et al., 2007). A sense of belonging implies boundaries, the sharing of a symbolic system and identification, and it contributes to emotional security and affective investment (Prezza & Constantini, 1998).

Three other components of psychological sense of community complement membership or sense of belonging: influence, fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection (Pretty et al., 2007). Influence refers to the notion that people and the community matter reciprocally and that each group could exert influence over the other. Need fulfilment refers to the perception that members' psychological and physical needs will be satisfied in the community, thereby reinforcing acceptable behaviour. Shared emotional connection refers to the belief that members have a shared history, place and experience (Peterson et al., 2006; Pretty et al., 2007).

Research on forced relocations has emphasised longing for a lost community (Kentridge, 2013) in which there were different forms of 'doing local social relations' (Savage, 2008, p. 161). Our purpose, then, is to understand the ways in which women reconstruct their relational ties (Gilbert, 2006) and whether they develop connections to a place not of their choosing, but in which they are ageing.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was conducted at a day centre for older people in Ikageng where all the participants experienced relocation as young adults. Most of the people attending the centre are women. They contribute part of their state pensions of R1200 per month (approximately £75) for daily meals; they also contribute to a burial fund and to a saving scheme. They meet daily to socialise and to participate in community outreach projects such as caring for people infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS, as well as taking care of orphaned children. Eleven women aged 70 years and older took part in the study.

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of North-West University. The manager of the day centre was contacted, and the aims of the research were explained to her. The manager contacted people to invite them to participate in the research. On the day of the data gathering, only the 11 women who had agreed to be research participants attended the day centre. They were informed that the aim of the research was to understand where they feel that they belong: Makwateng/Kloppersville where they grew up or Ikageng where they have lived since relocation. They were assured that their identities would remain protected, that the information they provided would be treated as confidential, that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any time.

Inclusion criteria were that participants had experienced forced relocation more than 50 years ago, were without any visible cognitive impairment and had agreed to participate in the study. All spoke Setswana, one of the 11 official languages of South Africa. One of the researchers who conducted the research and a co-author of this paper is fluent in Setswana. Responses of the participants were translated into English and checked by an independent researcher who understands Setswana.

A qualitative research approach was adopted because it could yield in-depth understanding of the experiences of the older women regarding their connection with people and place (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Ritchie & Lewis, 2009). Two qualitative data gathering methods were used. The Mmogo-method® involves the creation, by each participant, of a three-dimensional representation of the phenomenon of interest, followed by a conversation about the meaning of the representation (Chilisa, 2012; Roos, 2008, 2012). Visual representations produced from unstructured material are a means to understand how people react to similar events (Lazarus, 2006). The Mmogo-method® normally involves 10 to 12 people grouped around a table, who, after completing their individual representations, discuss their reactions to those of other participants.

In this study, participants were provided with materials including malleable clay, dried grass stalks, colourful beads in different sizes and a round cloth. Instructions were for each person *to make a visual image* (*model*) *of the place where you feel you belong*. After 30 minutes, when the participants had completed their visual representations, each was asked: *What did you make*? *Why did you make this representation in relation to where you feel you belong*? *Can you tell us more about how you felt when you had made/were making the models*? *What happened there*? *And how is it different from now*? After each participant had explained the meaning of their visual representation, the researcher asked the others to interpret key terms and to register their agreement or disagreement with the meanings raised. This is regarded as member checking whereby all participants contribute to the initial analysis of the data (Roos, 2012), thus adding to the trustworthiness of the findings.

The second method was a focus group with all participants. Its purpose was to stimulate group interaction and provide opportunities for eliciting forgotten details of the experiences of community they described in the first part of the data collection. Participants were asked what they saw in their visual representations, prompting group discussion of whether understandings were widely shared. The explanations of each visual representation as well as the discussions from the group about the visual representations were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and translated into English. The translation was checked by a second independent researcher.

Data analysis

As a result of the methods used for the collection of data, textual and visual data were obtained. Textual data formed the main source of data for this study. Transcripts were analysed by means of thematic analysis, informed by constructs of community described earlier. Individual and group discussions about the created visual representations informed understandings of elements of current and prior sense of community belonging. Photos of the representations were studied with the meanings the participants had assigned to them. They provided an anchor to the discussions about elements of community connections. The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured by combining multiple methods of data collection (physical representations, personal reflections on the physical representations and an initial verification of the themes by the participants) (Ellingson, 2009).

FINDINGS

The findings illustrate the relative importance of elements of community to these older adults and how these components differed from those recalled from their earlier lives before

relocation. Two dominant themes emerged from the data. These were connections to place and sense of belonging. Discussion of community as place illustrates how important places are nested within larger communities. Psychological aspects of belonging were differentially important in the current place compared with the place they lived before relocation. Peer relationships were central to late-life sense of community for participants.

Connections to place

As participants looked back on their former community, they recalled a place that had physical features that they valued: space to ensure privacy and land on which to raise cattle. The physicality of the former place was important in a practical sense, ensuring the ability to co-exist with others as well as to feed their families. However, participants also described internal boundaries that meant that only some sections of the community were available to them.

> In Kloppersville[Makwateng] we had big yards. You couldn't even hear others when they are fighting. If the man is fighting with the wife next door, you couldn't hear a thing because the house is far there in the middle of the big yard, you had your own privacy (Participant #2).

> The cattle were part of our lives where we were born. We used them for various purposes like ploughing and milking. We had some cattle, we reared some animals. (Participant #6). (Figure 1).

There were clear boundaries subdividing the Makwateng community. Participants 'knew their place', yet looked back on the community as a positive place to live.

> The whites [were] on one side, you were not allowed to go to the side of the whites…I like it in Makwateng where we used to live (stressing) nicely there, where we were relaxed. The only hard thing was that there was no money and we were just working for the whites but it was nice and enjoyable there was no other problem like we have today. (Participant #4).

As indicated in the quote at the beginning of the article, none of the participants mentioned place-based features of the community that could be considered of importance in Ikageng. There was no indication from participants of a strong connection to the land as they did in their earlier lives.

Figure 1.   Connections to place: cattle and traditional utensils

They moved us here … into shacks, they called them honde hoks [dog kennels]. Our houses are so close to one another as if they are for chickens … No! When your plate falls down or you fight in your house, next door they are listening to you. Not because they are inquisitive, no, it's because the houses are attached to one another. (Participant #1).

The only connection to place that they mentioned was the day centre, which was a setting that allowed for the development and maintenance of strong social connections with other women. As one participant said:

The only thing that makes me happy about Ikageng is the old-age centre (Participant #6).

Sense of belonging

Data on participants' sense of belonging to their former and current communities provide insights into what made them feel connected to their former community and what enhanced and detracted from the remaking of community in their current location. Belonging arose or was constrained through close connections to others and sharing of resources, shared rituals and generational relations.

Participants looked back on their former community as a place in which vulnerable people were cared for. They reminisced about a close-knit community, which they perceived as being safe and able to meet unconditionally the needs of community members.

We lived together, happy that time (Participant #6).

You would take a big thing [container] and pour out milk for the neighbours or those that are poor and to orphans so that the children do not sleep hungry (Participant #4 – all the other participants concurred).

Strong bonds with a small group of peers were also important for their sense of connection in Ikageng. There, the community was smaller and more focused on the group of women who shared interests in a safe place (the day centre) where they could meet as peers. The woman who said that the old age centre was the only place that made her happy went on to explain:

Older persons usually enjoy coming together as oumas [grandmothers], singing, laughing and enjoying themselves… It is like with us nowadays talking about the issues, a way of togetherness and showing community support (Participant #6).

Others agreed that the interaction among them contributed to their personal well-being. The strength of these connections is illustrated in their comments about being with others there. (Figure 2).

It relaxes the mind and takes out loneliness every day as we are laughing here (Participant #9).

[Interviewer]: Mama who is getting married here?

[Participant]: It's me and my friend, my friend *Agnes (pseudonym).

[Interviewer]: Your friend *Agnes? Who is *Agnes?

[Participant]: This one. (Speaking softly) (sitting next to her).

[Interviewer]: Where is the groom?

[Participant]: The groom is not here it's only me and my best lady. (laughing softly) (Participant #9).

Figure 2.   'Marriage' among friends.

Apart from their interactions as peers, they also engaged as volunteers to assist vulnerable people who had been infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

HIV is now everybody's problem and [we are doing] house visits (Participant #9).

A second way in which belonging was created and maintained was through shared rituals that linked people to each other and to those who had gone before them. Ancestral worship was and is an important way of feeling supported and of maintaining connections. People worshipped and practised rituals together, as they are still doing now in Ikageng, even though it was not the same as before they were relocated.

With this ceremony we were pleading or asking from God and the ancestors. In the old days they would call it 'Dikuku tsa molora' [cakes of ashes]. You called your family, your relatives, and friends all to come and speak to your forefathers. In other words, you call people who will help you pray for some help and guidance if one had problems (Participant #9). (Figure 3).

Figure 3.   Spiritual connections: ritual candles and cakes.

This are 'magobe', and rituals … with this we are pleading … it is culture, we are still practicing them even today … even though they are not the same as it was done in Makweteng. (Participant #1).

Generational relations were a prominent theme in the women's reflections on their community connections. Having strong, reciprocal generational relationships was highly valued. As they looked back at their lives in Makwateng, they remembered a place where older people watched out for younger people who in turn were helpful to them.

There was respect for one another (Participant #7).

Children were considered a community asset and responsibility.

Each and every child when making any mistake, [if] any parent and not actually his or her own parent sees, that parent or elder would discipline them. There was no way I would as a child stand there and insult this parent. A parent was a parent to every child, not only to his or her children (Participant #2).

Older people in turn were supported by the younger generation.

You would help an elderly person to carry his or her things to go home … you would help her buy [things] and give her change (Participant #2).

Generational relationships in Ikageng were strained. Participants felt used by young people who showed no interest in elders' expectations of intergenerational relationships. They said that the unspoken obligation of young people to support older people and to protect them from exploitation was not being honoured. (Figure 2)

They did not oppress the way they oppress older people now. There was no robbery. You would help elders to carry his or her things to go home. You would help her to find her money, give it to her and help her to buy what she wanted to buy. Not like nowadays, you just take out your money, it is theirs [the younger people]. They take and leave (Participant #7).

If I sit down with my children, I tell them about where I come from … I tell them when I was young I was still being disciplined and sent around [by older people]. [But] they will tell you that
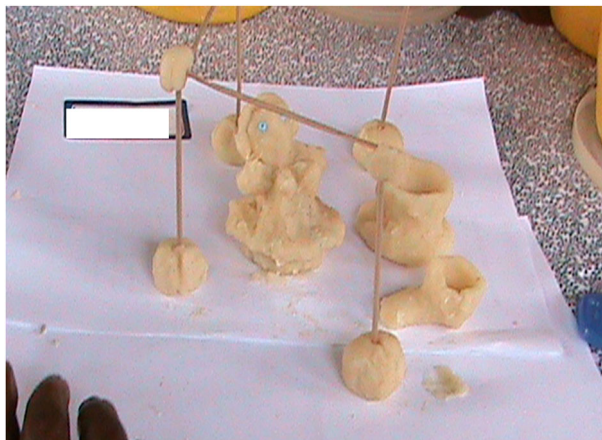

Figure 4.   Strained intergenerational relations.

we were not there and we were not with you when you were young. Leave us alone. And if you try to beat him, twenty police cars will come after you. (Participant #1).

In speaking of her visual representation of generational relationships, one participant said:

This is my grandchild. I have asked her to get me some water so that I can drink. Then this little girl will say: 'No I can't go fetch you some water, I know how to write.' [I ask her then]: Did we used to fetch water for our elders because we did not know how to write? She then answered: 'Yes you did it because you did not know how to read and write.' (Participant #5). (Figure 4).

They worry that they will be alone with a heavy burden of responsibility.

As time goes on the grants will be stopped. And when they are stopped, who is going to face the effects? Me as a grandparent? Who is going to take care of them? It's me. With what? With my pension. Yes. I no longer enjoy my pension. (Participant #8)

DISCUSSION

Findings from this study address assumptions from gerontology about the importance of community as place and from community psychology about community as a sense of belonging. The biographies of the participants in this study help inform our understanding of how personal history and context shape their conceptions of community. The connections that were central to them were to people of the same age who had travelled together through time and through difficult political processes.

In their discussions of the place of their childhood, participants recalled a setting that afforded privacy and a source of livelihood. Their discussions of place were almost entirely about home—their yard, their cattle and their separation from the neighbours. The broader community was a place divided where they inhabited a restricted space. In Ikageng, connections were to a restricted part of the community— a small building that comprised the day centre. It seems that community as a geographic location was not the central focus of their lives either as younger or older adults, a stark contrast to findings from other world regions of the importance of the natural setting and built environment (Rowles & Bernard, 2013) and of geographic communities as 'age-friendly' (Keating, Eales, & Phillips, 2013).

Sense of belonging was more central to these women's sense of community. Following Cramm et al. (2012), their well-being was promoted through psychosocial processes. Participants recalled their youth as a time when belonging was community-wide. All adults took an interest in children of the community. In turn, children were expected to be helpful to elders. In contrast to this broad sense of connections to others, participants' later-life community was much smaller, perhaps reconfigured of necessity to address their needs, goals and desires. As reported by other researchers, a shared-interest community with peers is safe and unconditional (Fried, 2000; Pretty et al., 2007), with a shared 'common affective union' (Blackshaw, 2010, p. 126). Connections were to people of the same age who had travelled together through time and through difficult political processes (Biggs, 2007; Brint 2001; Wong, Sands, & Solomon, 2010). Importantly, they inhabited a safe place (the day centre) that allowed their close bonds to develop and flourish. Perhaps they were among the fortunate in the face of hardship. Researchers have found that community relations are stronger for women, members of large families and for those with less education (Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001). We are not aware of extant studies on how political processes that marginalise vulnerable groups influence their sense of community.

Shared rituals are not included as an element of most conceptualisations of community. Yet they were important to these women. Ancestral worship is a longstanding practice. It may be especially important as a way to lift people from everyday hardships and link them to people's past as well as those who share current challenges in creating community.

Close, supportive generational relationships are a longstanding feature of discourses on African families (IAGG, 2012). Participants who looked back on their early lives, talked about strong connections between older and younger generations. Community was seen as a collective of people who took responsibility for one another. Adults had to be watchful of all children in the community; children had to obey and take care of their elders. As has been found in previous research, there is evidence in participants' discussions of their childhood community in the mid-20th century that individual freedoms in sub-Saharan Africa were less important than social connectedness and interdependency (Brint, 2001; Chilisa, 2012). There is a strong sense of loss in participants' discussion of generational relations in their current community. Young people are experienced as uncaring, rejecting the authority of the older people to exercise control in their relationship. Participants expressed great regret about the loss of community as a place of influence where members exerted influence over one another (Pretty et al., 2007).

Unsatisfactory intergenerational relations are not confined to communities with a history of forced relocation. They have been observed in other African countries in which the endorsement of collective community values has eroded (Van der Geest, 2002). Nonetheless, the lack of community as a generational bond is particularly poignant for participants in this study given their limited opportunities for creating a sense of belonging. Kentridge (2013) would argue that looking back to a better time is more reflective of dissatisfaction with current relationships than a statement about the existence of a golden area of close relationships. However, there is no doubt that for the women in this study, strained relationships raise fears that they will be unable to care for younger family members in the face of lack of support from them.

REMAKING COMMUNITY?

Reflections of participants in this study on their former and current communities have provided insights into elements of community that are important to older women who experience the trauma and loss of relocation (Nuttman-Shwartz et al., 2011) and whose lives are lived in conditions of poverty and numerous socio-economic problems (Ferreira & Van Dongen, 2004). They also speak to the need to bring together community understandings from social gerontology and community psychology. New understandings of place underline its importance to these older women for whom a profound sense of loss, associated with a childhood, ancestral place, cannot be recreated. Connections to others are also important. Loss of close generational relations was compensated only in part by close connections to a small group of peers, who had shared the journey through apartheid.

The 'narrative of community un-making' described by Kentridge (2013, p. 135) as part of the history of forced relocation was evident in participants' sense of erosion of the intergenerational community. From their perspective, their current environment lacked basic elements of community. They lived in a place with limited basic resources, and lacked positive generational relations. It is perhaps not surprising then that their energies were concentrated on creating a shared-interest community that felt safe and supportive.

Some have argued that such belonging of necessity comes with a high price. There is evidence that such communities of belonging are created in the context of high levels of need: low income, limited opportunities and overall lack of resources to control their lives (Botha, 2013; Means & Evans, 2012). Participants in this study were black, mainly uneducated and women who could only rely on a limited social network of peers to address their needs and ultimately to promote their well-being (Brint, 2001; Cramm et al., 2012; Totikidis & Prilleltensky, 2007; Xi, Hang, & Drentea, 2012). Savage (2008, p. 161) argued that such individuals need stability in interpersonal contexts, which are 'fickle and mobile'.

There is much to learn about the making of community in later life. The goal of social gerontologists to help create positive locations for ageing is important. Whether chosen or imposed, many people grow up and grow old in the same place. Yet there is much work to be performed to move beyond the belief that 'ageing in place' is something to strive for. In turn, community psychologists' conceptualisation of community as fostering a sense of belonging is critical to a sense of well-being in later life. A question that needs to be addressed is whether belonging that is fostered from need and insecurity can result in high quality of life of older persons. Working together across disciplines seems a promising direction in better understanding how place and belonging may be integral to communities that are good places to grow old.

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