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## Men's experiences of state sponsored housing in South Africa: emerging issues and key questions

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### ABSTRACT

In South African cities, millions of men and women living informally are being rehoused through the state-directed provision of formal houses to poor beneficiaries. This intervention is reshaping their lives, and innovatively targets beneficiaries with dependents, where over half are women. Aiming to redress the historical context of gendered inequality in housing ownership and house the very poor, these policy and implementation changes necessarily impact on men in terms of their power, resources and employment but in complex ways including positive and negative. The home remains significant for many men's desires for authority and identity. Using the lens of masculinity, this paper considers the ways in which men are experiencing this housing intervention, revealing a complex mix of outcomes in terms of their sense of identity, their relationships and their financial pressures and income generation. It draws on empirical work in South Africa to illuminate the importance of focusing on men in relation to housing and offers key questions for future research.

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## Introduction

Housing, as a material, economic and social reality, is explicitly gendered. Yet gendered analyses of housing, of residents' experiences of housing, homelessness, housing policy and change are relatively less common within housing and urban research (Maycock *et al.*, 2015, although see Watson & Austerberry's (1986) influential text). This includes work across the global south, although there are important exceptions (see Rakodi, 2014; Schlyter's edited collection on Africa, 1996; Varley, 2010). In response to scholarship which took men's experiences as the universal, gendered research focused on women's experiences of housing in particular, and critical scholarship on the ways in which housing finance, policy, land ownership, material quality and location have shaped women's abilities to thrive within cities have contributed to urban debate. Across this, and housing research more generally, the explicit experiences of men (as a complex and fluid gendered construct) in relation to housing, particularly in terms of policy, provision, materiality and legal concerns, have

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often been taken for granted or ignored (although see Varley and Blasco's analysis of older men and 'home' (2000), and Vaa's inclusion of men in an analysis of housing responsibilities [1996]). We argue here that this oversight is remarkable, given the centrality of housing in shaping men's sense of self, their assumptions about authority, financial security and safety. Men's emotional registers and constructions of masculinities in relation to the *home* have received some attention (Ahmet, 2013; Atherton, 2014; Meth, 2014; Gorman-Murray, 2008, 2015; May, 2014; Varley & Blasco, 2000) yet as Varley and Blasco claim this is limited (2000, p. 116), and as we outline below, these important works focus less on the socio-economic realities of *housing* as a policy intervention in relation to men but rather on home as a socio-spatial construct. The policy backcloth of housing is central to our analysis, as South Africa's current state-subsidised housing programme is dramatically altering the urban landscape. It is benefitting millions of residents and styling new labour mobility patterns. The programme explicitly supports housing subsidies for female recipients alongside, and, in practice at times in favour of male recipients, a social intervention which arguably is very progressive, but is one which nevertheless has consequences for male residents, including gains (as is our focus here), and losses with respect to subsidised housing. For these reasons, this paper illustrates the value of examining housing through the lens of masculinity and ultimately points to further research agendas to support a more complex gendered analysis of housing.

This paper draws on the independent work of two researchers examining residents' experiences of state-provided housing in South Africa in two cities to reveal insights into, and foster debate over, men's experiences of housing. It focuses on men who have benefitted from the housing programme, examining how the receipt of a subsidised house shapes their experiences of financial security, ways of sourcing income, sense of self-worth and identity and their relations with their partners and children. While some experiences we describe are not necessarily particular to men, our focus is on the intersections between masculine identities and experiences, and the practice of being a 'housing beneficiary' recognising that men who have not benefitted are a critical focus for future research and not the focus of this paper. The paper contends that this focus on masculinity reveals critical insights into the socio-political realities of housing, which are arguably central to evaluative and policy analyses, as well as to the growing body of work on masculinities.

## South African housing programme

With the advent of democracy in 1994, the South African government embarked on a massive programme of house-building, to overcome the huge deficits in decent accommodation and limitations on land ownership of the apartheid era. State funds have created new neighbourhoods of predominantly low-rise dwellings, transferred through individual ownership to SA citizens or permanent residents legally competent to contract meeting the criteria of having very low or no income, never having owned property or received government housing assistance before, and being part of a couple or having financial dependents, although single elderly, disabled people and military veterans can also qualify (RSA, 2009). Several million households have fallen into this target group, a reflection of the historic scale of deprivation, although it is likely that more women typically meet the requirements than men given the extent of absentee fathers in SA that we note below. The state's main funding instrument is a fiscally cautious once-off capital grant (Gilbert, 2004), argued to

help account for various problems in the implementation of the programme similar to that experienced in Chile (Gilbert, 2002).

With 2.7 million houses delivered by 2014 (RSA, 2014) the programme has been highly praised by UN-HABITAT (Huchzermeyer, 2011), but criticisms include that many of these new developments have been built in less advantageous urban edge localities (Gilbert, 2002) where land is cheap and uncontested, although a number of important exceptions are evident. Large size projects in edge locations coupled with an allocation system based on a waiting list that was massively over-subscribed relative to the rate of delivery, meant limited ability to match people to houses in places that suited their jobs or schooling, except where informal settlements were upgraded *in situ*. However, some government officials report that few beneficiaries turned down a house even if inconveniently situated for fear of waiting many more years for a second chance (Charlton, 2013). Perceived to be full of problems, inconsistencies and maladministration (Rubin, 2011; Tissington *et al.*, 2013), the waiting list allocation system was replaced in 2010 with a 'demand-data base' intended to shape the design of projects, refine allocations to better suit needs and offer more transparency in the delivery process. This system allows project-level criteria and a local committee to inform prioritisation in allocation, such as targeting elderly people or women-headed households first, although the system requires skill and capacity to manage as intended and it is not clear how well it is able to work in practice (Charlton, 2013; Tissington *et al.*, 2013).

The housing programme's nickname 'RDP housing' reflects its origins in the ANC governments' Reconstruction and Development Programme, and in addition to providing shelter and engineering services, the redistribution of land, and more specifically of property is part of the policy logic. However, the programme's ability to impact on poverty through home ownership as financial asset building is contested, echoing debates in other contexts on this issue (see for example Gilbert, 2012). Despite its large scale and significant impact, there has been comparatively little analysis of the lived experiences of this housing, although important examples of this include Robins (2002); Ross (2005, 2010); Lemanski (2009); Charlton (2013) and Meth (2015).

## **Gender relations, land and the housing programme in South Africa**

This paper takes as its starting point an approach to gender which is necessarily relational and fluid (over time and place) and is concerned with the intersections between gender and other elements of identity difference, including race, class, age and location. South Africa's gendered history of colonialism and apartheid racial segregation shape current day gender relations (Morrell *et al.*, 2012, see this paper for an excellent detailed overview). Historical discriminatory policies forced black South Africans into homelands and entrenched a migrant-labour system that persists to this day but that was and is gendered in form as a result of changing labour patterns over time. Rural areas in former homelands persist in housing poorer black women, the elderly and children while working aged black men and women migrate on a long-term basis to cities to seek employment, with men historically dominating paid work. With declines in mining and manufacturing sectors and a rise in service sector employment, women have increasingly been drawn to cities to seek work, but this often proves unsuccessful with many women turning to informal employment. Urban centres are dominated by a mix of female-headed households, 'nuclear' families, extended family living arrangements as well as one-person households, with recent trends

showing both a decline in household size, and an increase in single-parent and child-headed households, the latter in particular a direct result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Significantly more women-headed households experience poverty than their male counterparts, but it is important to note that severe forms of poverty and vulnerability are being felt across gender and age, exacerbated by inadequate and failing institutions of social support (NPC, 2012).

In terms of ownership and control, the gendered characteristics of housing circumstances in South Africa parallel most other African countries with clear historic and current divisions in ownership, control, affordability of and access to housing and land for women compared with men (with these figures distorted by race in countries where white minority rule existed). Across sub-Saharan Africa, women only control between 3.1 and 34.7 per cent of land holdings (with Cape Verde an outlier on 50.5 per cent) (FAO, 2015). Across the categories of renting, owning (but not fully paid off) and occupying rent free, men of all race groups in South Africa dominate as household head, except the category of owning outright where numbers are equal (SSA, 2013). These inequalities relate to historic and current patriarchal systems of property and land ownership and inheritance where race-based apartheid legislation made ownership and occupation in cities, for black women in particular, hard to achieve and where '[b]efore 1994, [non-white] women were not allowed to legally buy or own a home and land' (RSA, 2014, pp. 74–75). This was, and still is, compounded by historic and persistent 'socio-cultural practices [which] often prevent rural women from holding land titles' (FAO, 2015) evident in former homelands where customary land tenure is variably applied in terms of women's rights to land (FAO, 2015). Despite commitments to gender equity in processes of land reform, actual transformations in gendered access (by black women) to, and control over land in post-apartheid South Africa, have been hampered by a multitude of factors, including the low priority of land reform initiatives to the national state, the wider focus on racial inequality rather than gender inequality and a lack of local capacity to support beneficiaries who lack other resources (Walker, 2003). More generally, high rates of female unemployment and poverty circumscribe housing affordability, and a high prevalence of female-headed households in very poor settlements with tenure insecurity is common alongside poor living conditions and minimal asset accumulation. The housing programme, discussed above, explicitly emphasised an intent to redress these extensive inequalities (RSA, 1994) echoing the overall thrust of the democratic state to prioritise 'women's empowerment and the achievement of gender equality' (RSA, 2014, p. 73).

Housing policy was framed in terms of reducing poverty through meeting basic physical needs and assisting in progressive socio-economic change (Charlton and Kihato, 2006), which was in part articulated in terms of gender in early formulations of housing policy, but also in later reviews of the performance of the programme. A 'gendered focus' conveyed an emphasis on women, with the requirement to 'support the role of women in the housing delivery process' being identified in the white paper of 1994 on housing (RSA, 1994, Section 4.4.6). Thus, '[f]rom a gender perspective, it seems as if ... no policy-related obstacle prevents women from becoming home-owners' (Venter & Marais, 2006, p. 72). Indeed, the state's claim that approximately 56 per cent of all housing subsidies have been allocated to female beneficiaries (RSA, 2014, p. 68) suggests that the programme has had some quantifiable gendered successes for women, and it is lauded by the government for 'engendering housing in South Africa like in no other country' (RSA, 2014, p. 68).

This outcome has occurred despite the fact that in implementation, the programme did not benefit from an agenda informed by gender equality (Venter & Marais, 2006, p. 72 after

Public Service Commission, 2003, p. 58). Charlton's (2004) study specifies some of the gaps in the gender agenda noting that policy tended to focus more on women's engagement in construction rather than occupation of housing, that the particular needs of women who might be abused or vulnerable in some way are not prioritised and that gender-related issues post-occupation are not considered (2004, pp. 18–19). Chenwi & McLean (2009) claim that the socio-legal context of housing delivery 'results in inequities in access to housing' and denies 'the systemic constraints experienced by women within the social structure' (2009, p. 518). Persistent poverty is a key constraint, and inadequate housing is perilous for women because of childcare needs, vulnerability to violence and risks of evictions (Chenwi & McLean, 2009). Yet Zack & Charlton (2003) find that despite these concerns, female beneficiaries on the whole have experienced the housing product very positively. As is evident, much of this work examines questions of gender primarily from the perspective of women, and thereby overlooks men.

A focus on men's experiences of the housing programme is critical. Processes of housing occupation and living in state housing are dynamic, changeable and gendered for men and women. Cognisant of the messy politics of analysing gendered outcomes for men in contexts of evident inequality for women (Meth, 2009), we draw on both policy and intellectual claims to validate our focus on men. In policy terms, South Africa has signed up to the practice of gender mainstreaming, the full meaning of which is set out by the UN as incorporating a focus on men as it is 'the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels' (UN Women, 2015, no page number). We see no evidence of assessments of the outcomes of the housing programme in terms of men. Yet the programme and associated legal frameworks are distinctly gendered, recently illustrated by the current Minister of Human Settlements, Lindiwe Sisulu, who caused a storm by asserting the manipulation of housing policy in favour of female beneficiaries in contexts of marital separations: 'When they get divorced the house belongs to the woman. That is our policy. So the man picks up his jacket and gets out' (Sisulu in City Press, 2014). Although not yet a legal requirement, her intentions are explicitly gendered in favour of women, arguably a progressive intention given the historical lack of access by women, but with little awareness of implications for men and their offspring. We turn now to intellectual debates which validate an analysis of masculinity and socio-spatial change.

## **Masculinity and socio-spatial change**

Studies of the geographies of masculinity, and masculinities within development studies, have grown extensively over the past decade with a number of key edited collections on the topic (see Cleaver, 2002; Cornwall *et al.*, 2011; Gorman-Murray & Hopkins, 2014; van Hoven & Horschelmann, 2005) but the focus is commonly on masculine identity, violence, sexualities and activism with very little published where the focus is explicitly masculinities, home and housing (although see Gorman-Murray, 2008, 2015; chapters by Atherton, May and Meth, all 2014; and Varley & Blasco, 2000). Atherton, May and Meth (all 2014) drawing on feminist research, explore domesticity, domestic work, homelessness, violence and the significance of home for masculine identity. Older men, particularly those retired from the world of work in Mexico are the focus of Varley & Blasco's (2000) study where they explore their living arrangements, their rising senses of redundancy and of being burdensome within

the home and wider family, and their feelings of being 'exiled to the home' compounded by cramped living conditions (Varley & Blasco, 2000). This work points to the significance of masculinity in constructing men's relationships with their homes. Gorman-Murray's work on masculinity and the home (2008) conceptualises 'domestic masculinities' and 'masculine domesticities' with the former referring to 'the way both ideals of home and changing homemaking practices have (re)figured masculine identities' and the latter to 'how men's changing engagements with domesticity can refashion dominant discourses of home' (Gorman-Murray, 2008, p. 369). The explicit recognition of the fluidity of both home and masculine identity in his work is key, as is the recognition of the challenges of the masculine ideal of breadwinner, men's roles as parents (in contexts of uneven domestic work) and the distinctive experiences of home for heterosexual men in partnerships (compared with bachelor or gay men) (Gorman-Murray, 2008). This latter recognition of difference within the notion of men is critical in relation to our findings given the housing programme's explicit support of adults with dependents.

Our paper draws on these sensitivities to the ways in which gendered identities and roles are shaped in relation to the spaces they inhabit and transform, and explicitly examines how these interconnections unfold in the South African context where men are receiving state housing after decades of living informally or otherwise inadequately. Our spatial sensitivity builds on existing masculinities research in South Africa which examines context-specific changing and entrenched masculine identities in relation to wider socio-cultural and economic intersections (Meth, 2009; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Morrell & Swart, 2005; Morrell *et al.*, 2012; Ratele, 2014). This body of work draws on the prominent theorisation of masculinities as relational by Connell (2005) with the identification of 'hegemonic masculinity' as that occupying the dominant position in contrast to marginal masculinities, among others. Adapting this work to the global South, and South Africa in particular, has fostered critical engagement (authors listed above) with histories of colonialism, apartheid, racial discrimination, migration, violence and ongoing gender violence and poverty, in order to make sense of hegemonic masculinities in relation to South Africa's particular race-class histories. Both Ratele (2014) and Meth (2009) prioritise the significance of marginalisation to understanding the masculinities of poor black South African men, with Meth citing unemployment, homelessness and conditions of poor informal housing as central to shaping men's identities. Such contexts of marginality underscore the significance of the housing programme analysed below with Ratele (2014) neatly summarising the context of marginality impacting on men and boys as tied to 'capitalism, West–Rest geopolitical relations, poverty, unemployment, economic inequalities, race ideologies, corruption, poor governance, epidemics like HIV/AIDs and tuberculosis, cultural marginalisation, among other social, economic, and health issues' (Ratele, 2014, p. 36). These marginal realities are, however, dynamic, and central, therefore, is the recognition that masculinities (as with gender relations) are fluid constructs. This paper aimed to extend and further nuance theorisations of black urban men (Morrell *et al.*, 2012) including 'township masculinities' (Morrell, 2001, p. 24) but also masculinities resting on ideals of entitlement, as well as tradition, patriarchy and force (Morrell *et al.*, 2012) by bringing to the fore some of the distinct impacts of a welfare beneficiary-focused housing programme on men who were historically marginalised as marked *inter alia* by their occupation of informal housing (Meth, 2009).

This focus on the role of place and the home is mindful of the ways in which housing and home are often deemed feminine spaces as a result of women's roles as primary care givers, a trend evident in the South African context too. Yet for many poorer men and women, the ideal of the male breadwinner who departs from home on a daily basis to earn an income is not experienced as a result of very high rates of unemployment, (22.4 per cent for men nationally, 26.6 per cent for women—both the unexpanded (i.e. not including all who desire employment) unemployment rate, with African men and women experiencing the highest rates of around 40 per cent unemployment at the national scale) (SSA, 2014, pp. xxi and 15). Hence, many men spend extended periods of time in and around their home and neighbourhood. These home environments are characterised by significant social challenges shaping the lives of poor residents. Drug and alcohol abuse and high levels of violence, often domestic in nature, characterise everyday lives. Much of this is perpetrated by men, but men are vulnerable to particular forms of crime and violence too (Meth, 2009, 2014).

Furthermore, despite its middle-income status and welfare programme, welfare benefits for men in South Africa are very restricted providing little cushioning in times of crisis. Unemployment has negatively affected men's abilities to secure marriage through an inability to pay *ilobolo* (a form of bridewealth) (Kaufman *et al.*, 2001, p. 143) in turn leading to a decline in marital rates. Men instead express manhood through their 'success with women' which includes fathering offspring (Hunter, 2006, pp. 103, 106). Rates of absentee fathers in South Africa are extremely high (Richter *et al.*, 2012) and on the increase and contribute to analyses of men's failures as fathers, alongside their failure to support families financially or emotionally, adultery, violence, financial irresponsibility and chauvinistic attitudes towards women and domestic work (Morrell & Richter, 2006). However, Richter *et al.* (2012) note that many men retain a long-distance relationship with their children and Bray & Brandt's (2007) work in a poor settlement in Cape Town points to the importance for children of father and adult men's relationships with them. Similarly, Enderstein & Boonzaier's (2015) research with young fathers reveals how active choices around responsibility and caring, work to fashion new alternative masculine identities even within context of poverty. These complex socio-economic realities are structured further by housing: access to it, control over it, quality, cost, location and size. Experiences of housing are critical for men's identities. Referring to the house in Soweto, he moved into in 1946 with his first wife, Nelson Mandela states: 'It was the very opposite of grand, but it was my first true home of my own and I was mightily proud. A man is not a man until he has a house of his own' (Mandela, 1995, p. 120). We argue here that it is the combination of all these socio-economic factors (unemployment, insecurity, parenting, etc.) that shape men's relationship with their home, their sense of self, their well-being and their wealth and help shape household and family relationships.

In this paper, therefore, the twin backdrop of the challenging socio-economic context and the policy environment (of the housing programme) shape the arguments set out below, and it thus aims to contribute to the growing field of masculinity research, and gender and housing research by examining more explicitly the emotive and material experiences for men of housing change in relation to these societal processes. The paper does consider men's experiences of home as critical, but also incorporates an analysis of men's engagement with housing as a socio-political and material artefact.



## Methods and cases: Durban and Johannesburg

This paper draws on research from both authors' discreet projects. The Durban-based research rests on understandings forged from multiple projects in the area of Cato Crest (CC), part of the wider (well-located) Cato Manor settlement, conducted between 2002 and 2015. These examined men and women's experiences of informal housing, violence, parenting and then their experiences of the shift to formal housing. In combination, these projects employing a mixed qualitative methods approach including life history interviews, focus groups, solicited diaries, photography and drawing (see Meth & McClymont, 2009) which explored the views of residents, community leaders and the police to understand everyday lived experiences of housing change. The 2015 work, however, which forms the basis for this paper, focused exclusively on men who had benefitted from housing gain and used solicited diaries (see Meth, 2003) with 10 men to ascertain their specific experiences of this process. Although relatively small in number, these data sit alongside extensive data collection in this area both prior to and post-housing allocation and its analysis is framed by this wider context and understanding. Diaries on this occasion were provided to men over a two-week period, and they were encouraged to write in their first language (isiZulu for all men) in order to maximise the narrative depth of the entries. Following translation and transcription, diaries were analysed in terms of key themes that emerged from men's accounts.

The Johannesburg (JHB) research is located within qualitative interviews in 2010 and 2011 with 34 beneficiaries of RDP housing in a variety of localities across the metropolitan area and its hinterland, identified through an initial snowballing technique followed by random sampling. Fourteen of the interviews were with male beneficiaries, a further five with women who were cohabiting with male partners, and the remainder were with single female beneficiaries. The overall research project explored how people interacted with their housing, what role it played in their lives and why this was the case. Themes probed included the route or pathway into the housing, forms of income generation, usage of the house and site and physical and emotional relationship to it; and the relationship to and perception of the state. Discussions spanned both those resident in their housing and also those housing recipients who are—intriguingly - not resident, or not permanently so, offering further insight into complex connections to places beyond RDP settlements. In total, the beneficiary descriptions and reflections shed light on more than ten localities of RDP housing in Johannesburg or surrounding Gauteng and were supplemented by Charlton's direct observation of the five settlements located within JHB. This was not a study of a particular settlement but a study of a housing policy and programme as experienced by a selection of beneficiaries drawn from a metropolitan-scale subregion. For this paper, data are drawn from the interviews with male beneficiaries, each lasting between one and two hours, conducted with Charlton and a translator in the interviewee's preferred language, recorded, translated, transcribed and analysed.

We group our discussion into three broader areas, starting with how housing impacts on identity, shaping many positive emotions men have about their housing. The second set of themes discusses the specific experience of housing in the personal relationships men have as parents, husbands and in the extended family. The third set discusses financial pressures of housing, but also some of the difficulties of income generation. Throughout the discussion,

we make extensive use of quotations, elevating the voices of our male interviewees and diary writers in illustrating the lived experiences of the housing and its gendered dimensions.

## Establishing identity and affirming a sense of self

### *'In this house I feel like I'm a real person': impacts on identity*

Male residents were overwhelmingly positive about the impact of the new house on their lives, and their identity, and expressed deep gratitude to the state. Thulani<sup>1</sup> in Cato Crest stated three times in one paragraph in his diary how 'completely changed' his life is, since moving from his *mjondolo*<sup>2</sup> to his house. He stated that he would 'like to thank the Ethekweni [Durban] municipality to take me from the shack which was decreasing my dignity as a South African citizen' (Thulani Diary, CC 2015). The comparative identity of 'shack-dweller' was central to several men's accounts and their association with their place of habitation and their self-worth as a human, and as a man is marked: 'I was so happy [to move to the house] because the [the shack I was living in] I saw was not fit for a human being and ... I was just suffering' (Bongani Interview, Bramfischerville 2011), and '... they think you are a bad person because you are staying in the shack' (Mandla Diary, CC 2015). Informal urban living epitomises the problematic place of home in the history of racial discrimination and post-apartheid outcomes in South Africa and has contributed to men's intense sense of marginalisation (Meth, 2009). In relation to masculinity: 'The question of home is particularly poignant. Given the colonial history of land dispossession, apartheid's regime resettlement of black population in rural 'homelands', urban influx control, and migrancy 'home' remains a traumatic, undecided referent and experience' (Ratele, 2014, pp. 39–40). Arguably receipt of a new formal home has begun to shift some men's identification with and of home, within a wider context of ongoing forms of migration, mobility and poverty.

Some male participants tied this positive impact on their dignity and identity to their masculinity directly. Nkosinathi explained: 'If you are man and staying in the *mjondolo* you feel hopeless, ... since I receive this house ... I have dignity now as a man. I feel like I'm a real man...' (Diary, CC 2015). The new houses, and men's ownership of them, provided men with the possibility of gaining dignity and respect from their peers and family, witnessed by Zethulele's expression 'I feel respected to own this house' (Zethulele Diary, CC 2015) and Zungu's comments illustrate how the house affords particular relations of power: '... because I am the owner, I am responsible to making the rules of this house' (Zungu Diary, CC 2015). With power comes responsibility, but living in shacks also added burdens on men's lives particularly around protecting their family members from varying threats. In Meth (2009), men's failure to protect their loved ones from violence (while living in shack housing) proved hugely damaging for all, but Thulani explains how he no longer had to protect his family from the physical vulnerability of his shack caused by drunken people passing by.

Physical security is accompanied by a sense of control not possible in former circumstances such as being a tenant in someone else's yard, where 'you don't know when you come back [whether] the owner is angry or not, or has locked the gates, and when you knock they will tell you they own the place, not you, then [say] "pack your things and go"' (Fikile Interview, Devland Extension 27 2011).

## Positive emotions

Our research with men reveals their very deep positive emotions in relation to having a home and also how these emotions are intertwined with normal daily tasks: ‘I always have that excitement to go to my house ... I always have that smile on my face about staying in the new house’ (Thulani Diary, CC 2015). A number of men referred to ‘dreaming’ in some way as their new housing pervaded their sleep time visions, revealing the centrality of a house of their own to their being: ‘It makes me feel good [to have my own house]...Even when I get my dreams, I just dream about my house’ (Fikile Interview, Devland Ext 27 2011) and ‘That time I was thinking I’m sleeping and dreaming to get the house. I touch myself to feel that I’m still alive or I’m not sleeping and my head was spinning. I notice myself that I’m not sleeping but it is a happiness coming in my heart’ (Zungu Diary, CC 2015). Similarly, Fikile conveyed the excitement he felt ‘ja, hey...for the first time I was crazy, crazy. I didn’t believe...Yesus! My heart was happy’ (Fikile Interview, Devland Extension 27 2011); and whole families were caught up: ‘My family were so happy for me to get this house and some members of my family didn’t go to work that day because of excitement and helping for the cleaning of the new house...’ (Mandla Diary, CC 2015).

I was so excited when the committees called and tell that I’m going to get the house. I was happy like a child because I was thinking all the experiences I had at *mjondolo* ... My family members came here in different times to see that is that real ... I have a peace in my heart and I notice that I’m gaining weight because of the free heart. (Zethulele Diary, CC 2015)

Comments reflect the fulfilment of long-held fantasies and aspirations that had seemed out of reach ‘receiving the house is like heaven. My house has four bedrooms. It is like a dream to have separate room’ (Sfiso Diary, CC 2015). These emotional descriptions also extend beyond individual advantage revealing a wider register of a sense of citizenship and concern for the well-being of others: ‘I can tell [former housing minister] Tokyo Sexwale you really help me lot, just keep up and do for other people, not for me only, just help other people’ (Fikile Interview, Devland Ext 27 2011).

## Men and relationships

### Impact on parenting and children

New housing positively impacts on both parents and children because of the benefits of formalised internal layouts which result in separate bedroom/s, bathroom and eating spaces; and the significant advantages of increased space for everyday practices: ‘I am so happy because my children will not go outside if I need to bath or to change the clothes ... My children are able to do their school work without any interruption sometimes they use their bedroom or sitting to do their homework’ (Thulani Diary, CC 2015). These relatively mundane performances of domestic tasks and leisure practices (including eating together and watching TV) were noted by most of the participants in Cato Crest, and their association with spatial change was detailed illustrating their significance for these men’s lives: Siphelile’s otherwise brief diary provided a clear description of his new space and again the issue of children and their homework arose:

My new house has two bedrooms one is for my children and other one is for mine and my wife. We have also the kitchen as well as the sitting room. My wife has more space at her kitchen and she able to do the proper groceries every month. My children have the space to

write their school work at the sitting room. My house has the passage and also the bathroom inside. (Siphelele Diary, CC 2015)

This concern for homework reveals men's desires to engage with their children, monitor their work, as well as to provide them with an appropriate environment for studying (Mandla Diary, CC 2015). New houses and their surrounds also provide men with opportunities to raise and educate children about 'good house-keeping', including caring for plants and flowers (Mandla Diary, CC 2015), which because of poor conditions, was often unattainable in the shack housing:

I love so much my house and it is clean. I teach my children to clean the yard. They are able to sweep the yard of my house because they are learning from me to be clean. I teach them many things in this house because at *mjondolo* was not easy as houses are crowded. If you try to clean at *mjondolo* people look at you and laugh at you because everything there is dirty. (Nkosinathi Diary, CC 2015)

Here, the new space of a formal house supports men's practices of caring and providing guidance to their children, both central to masculine identities of fathers (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). In some instances, this parenting role extended to setting an example of civic responsibility, good neighbourliness and stepping up to the perceived expectations of the state, in keeping the pavement and the road clean, orderly and free of stones and glass that could be hazardous to children:

I am happy [with the RDP house] that is why I did this house so nicely, I met the government half way. In fact our street ... can you see it is clean? I did it myself, I did not call some worker [to] come do it, I want to show him [government], he must cope and then we do it [too]. (Owen Interview, Orange Farm 2011)

In some cases, the government-sponsored house has enabled a foothold in the city for family members from elsewhere to join the male head of household and to improve their prospects. Interviewee Thomas said that without the government-sponsored house, his children would not have been able to join him in Johannesburg and would instead be 'roaming around the streets at home [in Venda]' (Thomas Interview, Tembisa 2011).

In contrast to these examples of family consolidation, housing size and location can also result in spatially split families. The Johannesburg research encountered home-owning fathers living apart from children, sometimes due to the locational disconnect between parents' place of work and the house but also resulting from the lack of appropriate schooling in the vicinity of the new RDP house. In these cases, children were lodged with their grandmother in an older township or more established neighbourhood, where the necessary level of schooling was already available (Andile Interview, JHB 2011; Bongani, Interview, Bramfischerville 2011). Thus, despite the clear advantages RDP housing can offer for parenting, the extent of neighbourhood maturity in terms of associated facilities and amenities is a key factor in this, as demonstrated in the findings from Cato Crest which benefits from the multisectoral investment of the wider Cato Manor project into local schools and health services.

### **Privacy, intimacy and gender roles**

Impacts of new housing provision on intimate relationships between men and women were mixed, but on the whole positive: Nkosinathi describes how living in their new house helped to foster particular (arguably problematic and uneven) gendered practices between himself

and his female partner, which are a function of his 'proper house': 'My partner is respecting me, she is able to give me food with the tray as the head of the house because we are staying in the proper house. I have that dignity as the man and I am so happy about that'. Here, his formal house supports his aspirations for a 'hegemonic' masculine identity, although he does reveal how he, as a man, accepted the sleight of shack living on his masculinity: 'I love her because she was staying with me at *mjondolo*' (Nkosinathi Diary, CC 2015). This acceptance/burden of male responsibility to provide a house for his partner and family was also identified by Thulani who stated: 'I love my family and [they] were tolerating me while I was not have money to build the house' (Diary, CC 2015). Several men discussed the advantages for privacy of their new houses tying this to their new separation of bedrooms (Mandla Diary CC, 2015). Earlier in this paper, issues of getting dressed or washed were identified as now easier to perform, but sexual relations were also discussed (Figure 1).

'... If we want to do the thing for old people we don't have to be stressed [about] the children or neighbours' (Mandla Diary CC, 2015) and Thulani explained 'It was difficult before to us as parents of the children to do thing of the old people such as ... [sex]. We always check the children are sleeping before we do anything. I was happy if I see my children playing during the day because I know that they will sleep flat at night even if we pray with the mother they will not hear anything because [they] are tired' (Thulani Diary, CC 2015). Anxiety over lack of privacy in relation to sexuality was a prominent theme among men and women living in shacks (see Meth, 2009) and concerns about how this lack of privacy may foster early sexualisation of young people proved very worrying for shack residents. But the presence of children in single-roomed shacks was not the only difficulty for men. Sfiso describes how his relationship with his girlfriend has been enriched because of his new formal house, and his contrast of rural with shack ways of living drive home the significance of the disparity in housing quality:



**Figure 1.** Adult bedroom in Cato Crest (Source: Meth, 2011).

I have a good relationship with my girlfriend... She is living in rural area. Sometimes she visits me and she is also happy because she didn't like to visit me while I was staying in the shack. She visit few times at *mjondolo* but now she likes to visit me most of the time. She was complaining about the dirt at *mjondolo*. I understand her because even me the first time I came at Cato Crest in 2002 it was hard because of the life of the people there. I didn't know that one day I will [be used] ... to that kind of life. (Sfiso Diary, CC 2015)

### **Impact on wider social-cultural relations and practices**

Housing form and quality impact on social relations and men's capacity for sociability, hosting and providing, supporting Gorman-Murray's concept of 'domestic masculinities' where identities are fluid in contexts of changing home-making practices, but also wider, more substantive, housing change. Men were concerned about the 'bad condition of the shack' (Thulani Diary, CC 2015): 'The time I was staying at *mjondolo* my mother never visit. It was difficult to bring your parents in the dirty place because was not safe. My shack was very small for visitors' (Sfiso Diary, CC 2015). 'It is very nice for me to own this house because my family able to visit after I receive this house' (Zethulele Diary, CC 2015). Being able to offer a space to relatives (overnight or on a more permanent basis) was commonly cited: 'My new house is a blessing to me because my families are able to visit here which is nice. I am not forced to go to rural area for visiting them because are also coming here. My brother is staying with me full time because at *mjondolo* the space was too small for the visitors' (Zungu Diary, CC 2015). New housing plays a role then in shaping the interconnections between rural and urban living, facilitating ease of movement and providing an urban base for beneficiaries beyond the individual:

If my relatives want to sleep there is no problem of space. ... My new house has the good impact not only for my family even the people who are staying in rural area but specific my relatives if they need something in Durban or the transport finish while are still busy in Durban they are not worried where they going to sleep because I have enough space now in my house. (Thulani Diary, CC 2015)

The home space is also central to men's abilities to entertain. The counterpoint, shack housing, illustrates just how difficult these social practices were before formal houses were received. Electrification and gaining space for consumption were key:

Today is Saturday my friends who are living in other area is visiting me and we are going to have a *braai* [BBQ] because it is the weekend and is nice to enjoy life as we are living in the proper house now. At *mjondolo* was not easy to have the braai. I'm so happy because before if we want to have a braai or to socialize with my friends we go to somewhere else so that to eat meat or to have the braai if it is a weekend. Everything is happening in my house now and we are free. (Mandla Diary, CC 2015)

My brother is visiting my family and my partner is preparing the meal for dinner. I am happy because we have the fridge and she will get the cold drink in the fridge for my brother. At *mjondolo* if you have the visitor you have to go the shop to find some drink and meat to cook for the visitor. (Thulani Diary, CC 2015)

Children's capacities to socialise were also transformed by their new house and this was a source of joy for fathers: 'I am happy to have this house special for my children are very happy and friends are visiting them because they are not fear that are staying in the bad condition' (Thulani Diary, CC 2015).

The importance of space for entertaining and socialising was reinforced in the Johannesburg research by single men whose RDP house was a small ‘starter house’ or was undivided with internal partitions, typical in the early generation of the housing and which they had not had the means to improve. These men talk about family visitors who cannot be accommodated overnight, or about sending children to live with relatives as one-room living alone with a male adult was inappropriate (Oliver Interview, Orange Farm 2011, Bongani Interview, Bramfischerville 2011).

Finally, the ability to practice traditional rituals in the context of new housing revealed mixed outcomes which were intimately bound up with the spatial characteristics of their urban home in contrast to their rural one. Some men pointed to the small plot size of new houses but also limited access points for vehicles in the steep terrain of Cato Crest as prohibiting or adding expense to ritual practices particularly in the context of funerals. On the other hand, men also explained how the formality and their ownership of the new house, as well as for some, the added space of their formal plot facilitated ritual practices, which included slaughtering goats and chickens and the ability to communicate with ancestors and that this added to their recognition of their house as ‘their home’: ‘In this house I can do it even the ritual things because it is the formal house and there is no need to go to rural area all the times if I need to do something and I can do it here now’ (Zungu Diary, CC 2015) and ‘We did ritual thing privately in my house without any neighbour notice. I take this house as my home because I did everything which I was supposed to do in rural area like ritual things’ (Thulani Diary, CC 2015). Here, new housing, confirmed in its role as ‘home’, directly shapes men’s domestic practices in relation to hosting and entertaining and affords the performance of masculine identities associated with tradition deemed important by these men, as well as reducing the travel time and costs associated with cultural practices.

## **Financial pressure and income generation**

### ***Men, income, resources and new housing***

For men, impacts on employment or income generation after the receipt of a house depended largely on the location of the new housing. The Johannesburg cases included more diverse originating housing conditions and locations, as well as end-point housing types compared with those in Durban, which focused on one settlement with *in situ* relocation from informal into formal housing although not onto the same original plots (see Figure 2). Thus, questions of location are more significant for the Johannesburg cases and showed mixed outcomes. In some instances, the new house became the basis for a business or subletting of secondary accommodation, thus directly facilitating income generation. In other cases, it emerged that housing beneficiaries were spending nights or weeks in another part of the city, away from their new house, as they could not afford (in time or cost terms) to commute from the house in an outlying area to more central localities where they are able to earn an income.

For example, respondent Andile has an RDP house to the far south of Johannesburg in neighbouring Emfuleni municipality which he visits intermittently when he can afford to, as it is two hours’ train ride away. The rest of the time he and his wife sleep informally at their pavement trading stall in central Johannesburg, while his two children live with their grandmother in Soweto (Charlton, 2013 after Andile Interview, JHB 2010). In this case, the house does not assist him to earn an income, either on site or within commuting distance,



**Figure 2.** New RDP Housing in Cato Crest, Durban (Source: Meth, 2011).

paralleling a refrain repeated in many of the interviews in RDP settlements that ‘there is no job in this area.’ Thus, although Andile actively sourced his house on the secondary market and intends to keep it, the benefits of the state’s housing programme as a platform for socio-economic advancement (Zack & Charlton, 2003) are limited: his every-day life remains one of informal street-living, separated from his children. Nevertheless, the psychological or emotional importance of the house should not be underestimated as discussed above, along with the hope for the future it represents, despite the gaps evident around the housing’s role in economic advancement (Charlton, 2013).

### ***New identity as consumers alongside persisting poverty***

Housing recipients use the word ‘proper’ to describe their new home, and point to the relational shift in expectations, practices and emotions around consumption, as a function of this proper house. Purchasing furniture was a dominant practice. For some men, the small size of their former shack, the lack of standard features (i.e. windows) or its vulnerability to rain or theft, precluded possessing furniture or furnishings such as curtains. With their move into proper housing, men were now able to consume in a manner which they deemed suitable: ‘...now I’m able to buy whatever I like for my house because this house is safe’ (Zungu Diary, CC 2015), and, ‘We are able to buy the furniture which we like because no rain will damage the furniture’ (Mandla Diary, CC 2015) (see Figure 3). Consumption practices related also to perishable items, and safety, refrigeration and storage space-affected grocery patterns: ‘We are able to do the groceries of meat like other people, at *mjondolo* we didn’t buy more food because we fear the thieves will come and steal our food because we didn’t have the proper locker’ (Thulani Diary, CC 2015).

Other men were, however, negatively influenced by social expectations around consumption and display due to their cost, as poverty is still rife among housing beneficiaries: ‘... the new house is costing because we have to buy sofa, fridge, TV as well as DSTV. At *mjondolo* we didn’t need the furniture but now it is not look good if the house is empty’ (Nkosinathi Diary, CC 2015). Similar sentiments are expressed by others: ‘We are spending a lot of





**Figure 3.** Interior of a new house with consumer items (Source: Charlton, 2011).

money now in these new houses to compare the shack's life because we have to buy thing for the house such as furniture' (Thulani Diary, CC 2015). Difficulties in affordability lead to inter-household jealousies and personal conflict relating to low incomes or unemployment: 'The only thing which is stressing me to look other neighbour's houses look beautiful and my house is not look good because I have failed to have money' (Nkosinathi Diary, CC 2015). These concerns add an important dimension to Gorman-Murray's concept of domestic masculinities, revealing how failed ideals of home-making impact on men's sense of self, and they support Ratele's identification of the perils of consumption in contexts of poverty particularly in relation to a wider trend of consumption-driven masculinities among South African men (Ratele, 2014, p. 34 after Viljoen, 2008).

As discussed in various analyses of the housing programme (see Cross, 2013; Tissington, 2011 and Charlton & Kihato, 2006), there is little evidence of it actively reducing poverty for urban residents. Indeed, for some, the costs of owning a new house are prohibitive, or the costs of a poorly located house, in terms of transportation and access to employment, work to render the house untenable, or only intermittently useful (as discussed earlier in relation to mobility and employment). Despite the highly positive views of men who'd received housing identified in this paper, negative consequences of poverty were evident: 'Many people at Cato Crest are not working and people have the families need to be supported. Some they involve to the alcohol because they are trying to forget the pain of not working' (Mandla Diary, CC 2015).

Sometime we sleep without eating food ... We are very poor and we can't afford to support our children. My other daughter did not get [her school results] ... because she didn't finish paying the school fees. That entire thing is painful to me as a father is my child did not get the result at school because of the shortage of money... My old children been trying to search the

opportunity of work but they can't get it ... We are grateful to get these houses but it is not enough. (Siphelele Diary, CC 2015)

The gendered relationship between housing and poverty requires further research. The lack of integration of employment and housing policy is a significant concern (Meth, 2015), but the gendered differences in unemployment levels do confirm that urban poverty is likely to affect women more than men, although how housing will work in the future to underpin men and women's livelihoods is as yet unclear. Furthermore, links between employment, income/costs and poor men who have not benefitted from state-provided housing is entirely unknown.

### ***Gendered tensions over ownership***

Housing is a valuable asset, both financially and in terms of security, thus decisions over who controls the asset, particularly when new patterns of ownership destabilises historic gendered inequalities, can cause tension. These can arise during processes of housing allocation, but also in cases of relationship breakdowns, bearing in mind the Minister's suggestion (discussed earlier) that in divorce 'men should pick up their jackets and get out'. The eligibility criteria mark certain residents such as single adults with no dependents as unlikely to gain housing, and those who succeed in their applications often wait decades for their house. These policy-driven realities shape tensions. In the context of Cato Crest, a number of men identified strains associated with this, revealing that for some, new houses could actually be damaging for relationships (both interpersonal but also familial). Mandla actually titled the first section of his diary: 'the violence between families cause by houses' and went on to explain:

The violence at Cato Crest is happening between the families when they receive the RDP houses. The woman and the man are fighting for the house ... in the shack everything are fine for their relationship but when the development starts the problem also start and fighting for the ownership ... Other tension is between relatives if were living together in the shack and fighting for the ownership of the house. Some of the families went to the police because of fighting of the house. When the two people are living together in shack and one person received the house than start a problem. The people notice these houses are free than starting fighting. Sometimes you find that the man beating the woman so that woman will run away and the man left alone in the house. (Mandla Diary, CC 2015)

The predominance of male aggression enacted against women as a result of tension over the housing asset is arguably a function of wider socio-economic relations, specifically persisting patriarchy, normalisation of violence and extensive poverty (Meth, 2015) but this needs further research as, if the allocation process has benefitted more women than men (a progressive intervention), it will have had consequences for poor men (and women may suffer too as a result).

### **Conclusions and key questions for future research**

This paper argues that the gendered outcomes and experiences of the South African housing programme are in some ways specific for men, particularly where impacts shape men's ideas and experiences of masculinity. These impacts can work to either reaffirm, perhaps reinstate, men's sense of dominance and power or they can assist in lifting men out of

very negative spaces (both material and emotional) which must factor in explanations for male aggression, disillusionment, depression and anti-social behaviour (Meth, 2009). In other respects, the paper's arguments illustrate similar experiences to those documented for women (see Meth, 2015; Charlton, 2004, 2013) particularly in relation to impacts on parenting, costs and consumption, identity, tensions of ownership and positive emotions. Here, this paper offers insights into these similar experiences and in doing so works to historically contextualise, humanise and enrich the somewhat generic notion of a housing beneficiary, as well as highlighting the range of socio-material issues which persist as concerns for men which arguably are overlooked.

Read against South Africa's harsh socio-economic context of joblessness, substance abuse and violence along with the absence of a social safety net targeting men, the masculine experiences discussed here illuminate the significance of the housing policy intervention for men. In our research, change in housing circumstances through government intervention has had largely positive impacts on family life, self-worth and dignity for male housing beneficiaries, by definition in relationships with spouses or dependents. Yet as a precious resource, the housing intervention can also provoke family contestations and exacerbate tensions and distinctions derived from consumption pressures in poverty contexts. Further, incomplete neighbourhoods and a housing benefit arguably ill-adapted to high unemployment in sprawling cities means that it does not always provide a basis for settled family life as assumed, further straining navigation of resource-constrained lives for some men. These diverse realities of poor men's lives, a cohort of national concern, are fundamentally important in assessing the South African housing policy and its impact.

As is evident from the discussion, there is a persistent gap in understanding both in empirical terms but also in terms of theorisation of the process of allocation (as well as exclusion), ownership, experience and use of housing in terms of gender, bearing in mind the highly fraught socio-economic context of South Africa. More work needs to be conducted on the existence and impact of tensions between men and women, and men and men that arise out of the processes of gaining and living in a house, as well as importantly the experiences of men who do not receive houses. Work is also needed on the longer term impact of housing on men and their wider household's livelihoods and then how this might shape or impact on family life in a longitudinal manner in terms of the ideas of consolidation and fragmentation identified above. The well-documented poor quality of housing construction is a further area of research concern, testing residents' skills and financial capacities to repair and maintain properties, but also providing opportunities for small-scale employment. This is very likely to be gendered and deserves proper attention. In conclusion, analyses of housing and infrastructure, specifically those arising from policy interventions, must explore the gendered social dimensions more fully, drawing on a more nuanced approach to gender which recognises that impacts on poor men are diverse but critical for wider society.

## Notes

1. All participants' names are pseudonyms.
2. Local term for shack house.

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