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# Attachment to land: Land Reform and the Anglican Church of Southern Africa

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**Abstract**

The land and the people are inextricably linked and inter-dependent. Place attachment provides a useful lens through which to examine land reform and people's attachment to land. Sebastien's framework of place identity and place dependence is used to appreciate how place attachment is expressed in the ancient biblical texts of Psalm 37 and Matthew's Beatitudes despite lack of ownership. In contexts of injustice, place attachment was able to provide hope for the disenfranchised. The framework for place attachment is further applied to the more recent context of land reform in South Africa. The lessons from appreciating place attachment and the complexity of land as more than just an economic tradeable asset can provide valuable lessons to the Anglican Church of Southern Africa in redressing some of the many injustices of the past by appreciating the complexity of land, contributing to the conversation, and assisting the poor and marginalised as they create opportunities for the sustainable development of church land as responsible stewards fulfilling the Gospel imperative.

**Keywords:** land, place attachment, land reform, Anglican church, South Africa.

## Introduction

Land is an emotive and controversial subject, particularly in South Africa, where the land reform debate has been evolving since the early 1990s. Land reform was designed to redress the historical injustices of Apartheid, support economic growth and reduce poverty, particularly in the rural areas (Integrated Planning Services, 1997:7). Therefore, the focus of land reform was primarily economic, largely concerning the productive potential of land, with the target of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) involving the transfer of 30% of white commercial farming land to poor black farmers in the first five years of land reform (African National Congress, 1994:20). Land was understood as an economic asset which could be exploited, traded and exchanged, and land reform became a political and emotive pressure point.

However, in the last few years it has been noted that the struggle over land seemingly has its roots in the emotional attachment to land, rather than its economic value (Resane, 2019:1). Based on family history and his psychology training, Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba understands the emotional component of the land reform debate and the scars in the psyche which result from land seizure (Makgoba, 2018a). Only recently has there been acknowledgement by government that people belong to the land as part of their social identity, culture and very existence (Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture, 2019:5). Place

Attachment Theory provides a lens through which to understand the cognitive-emotional bonds and the meanings ascribed to land which may influence the land reform process.

It is interesting that ancient texts recognised the emotional attachment to land. Since biblical times, land has been freighted with layers of complexity, and ancient Biblical texts such as Psalm 37 and Matthew 5 both speak of peoples who were dispossessed and yet remained attached to the land. These texts recognised place attachment in contexts of injustice and provided a beacon of hope in each instance. The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann argues that Israel's history of gift and grasp, echoed in the oscillation between landedness and landlessness, should concern the church because coveting yields anxiety but the meek who are homeless will inherit the land (Brueggemann, 2002:172). The insights into place attachment from both the biblical texts and the recent experiences of the land reform process in South Africa provide the Anglican Church of Southern Africa with an understanding and sensitivity to people who are associated with their land holdings, and the long-term sustainable use thereof. This paper explores the contribution that the church can make to the land reform debate and process as a substantial land owner in South Africa in the context of perpetuated unequal distribution of land. It may also have application within other countries where indigenous populations have also been dispossessed.

## MATERIAL RELIGION AND PLACE ATTACHMENT THEORY

Place Attachment Theory has its origin *inter alia* within Material Religion, as expressed by Meyer (2014), Chidester (2018), Keane (2018) and others. Material Religion recognizes that material objects, such as land, acquire meaning and facilitate transcendence for their users. These material objects do not have intrinsic meanings, but are "animated" through interpretive and authenticating processes (e.g. ritualization), where meaning is ascribed and they become "things that matter". It is the meaning that is ascribed to the object by the interested and affected individuals or communities that ties the people to the object, rather than the object itself. Brueggemann has argued that land is a gift from God, contending that people do not own the land, but rather belong to the land, and are shaped by the land and its history (Brueggemann, 2002:204). Land was therefore material to Israel's faith and existence. Thus, living and working on land gives land meaning and can enable emotional and spiritual linkages with the land.

Within the broad framework of material religion, the psychological theory of Place Attachment describes the process of how intricate bonds are forged with land. Scannell and Gifford (2014:274) describe Place Attachment as the cognitive-emotional bond (sense of place) that people develop towards places. The degree of attachment tends to strengthen with iterative positive interactions and memories. It is both the physical and cultural characteristics combined with the affective perceptions and functional needs that together shape place attachment (Ujang & Zakariya, 2015:274). Over time, a particular place becomes a referent, and provides an individual and community with a sense of continuity (place-referent continuity; Scannell & Gifford, 2014:278). Places of worship, sacred structures, burial sites, places in nature, and mythical sites aptly illustrate the relationship between religion and place attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2014:284).

The outcomes of place attachment represent the expression of and impact of place attachment. Scannell and Gifford (2014:284-289) categorise the outcomes of place attachment into place perception, place preservation, place loss and well-being benefits:

- Places of attachment are entrenched with personal meanings and layers from the past that merge with self-identity and create place-perception;
- Place preservation creates pro-environmental behaviours that reflect a direct attempt to preserve a particular place and protect it from damage;
- Sometimes place attachment is only revealed when places are threatened or lost;

- The extent of place attachment can also be gauged by examining the psychological benefits for well-being based on memories, belonging, relaxation, positive emotions, activity support, physical and psychological comfort, self-growth, control, autonomy and freedom, entertainment, connecting to nature, practical benefits, privacy and aesthetics.

Sebastien provides a spatial insight to augment the psychological inclination of the Scannell and Gifford framework. For Sebastien (2020:204), a place is a space that is significant because of individual, collective or cultural processes, through memories, symbols or experiences that have been lived in that place. A place is shaped physically and psychologically/spiritually by its inhabitants, but place also shapes the inhabitants as it mediates the meanings ascribed to it. Humans are therefore place-makers and meaning-makers, but place is also a co-creator of who people are or become.

Based on the qualitative research of four different case studies in France and Tanzania, Sebastien (2020:210-213) proposed a model that examined place dependence and place identity as indicators of place attachment. Sebastien's model provides the lens for the research.

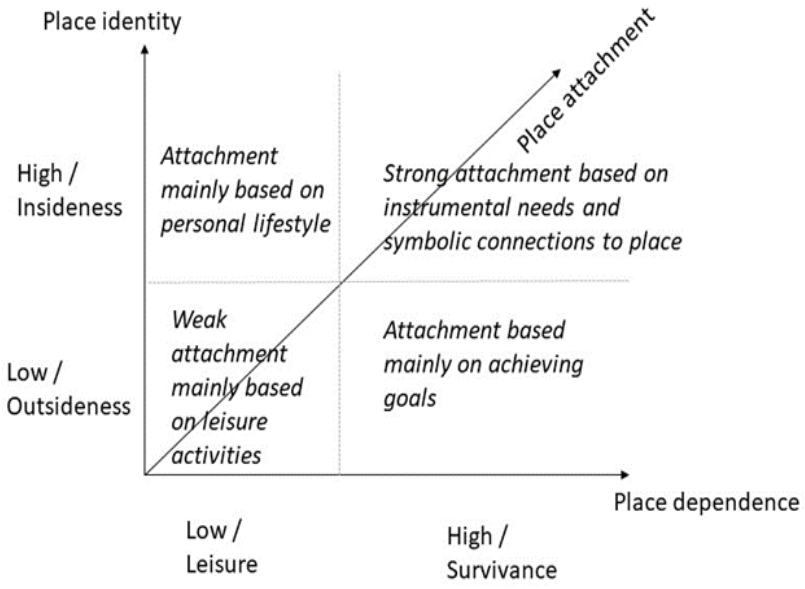


*Figure 1: Place Attachment Framework of Sebastien (Source: Sebastien, 2020:213)*

Place dependence is the functional attachment to place because of its ability to satisfy needs and goals (Scannell & Gifford, 2014:275). The place becomes a resource for satisfying goals, which in turn becomes a relationship of dependence (Sebastien, 2020:206). Place dependence often refers to an economic bond, and is high when livelihoods depend on the natural resources within a place. Fish farming at iSimangaliso Wetland Park and cannabis farming in the valleys of the Northern Drakensberg are two such examples where place dependence is high. Place dependence is also affected by sentimental and cultural attachment. When a place and its associated natural resources are considered a gift from God, attachment is given a sacred dimension.

Place identity refers to the incorporation of place into a broader understanding of self (Scannell & Gifford, 2014:275). People self-define through places where specific physical settings and symbolic connections create a self-identity dependent on particular values, attitudes and

beliefs (Sebastien, 2020:206). Place identity examines the role that the physical environment plays in maintaining identity, based on communal roots, nostalgia and social markers. "Insideness" represents a commitment to the place from an individual and collective perspective, while "outsideness" represents the separation of the individual who is transformed into an observer of that place.

Based on Sebastien's analysis, place attachment is multi-faceted and is reflected in the relationship between place dependency and place identity and is measured in terms of distance from the graph's origin. Stronger place attachment is reflected further away from the origin of the graph and weaker place attachment is closer to the origin: where there is a high degree of "insideness" and identification/connection with the land, combined with a high dependence on the land for survival, the intersection of place identity and place dependence is further away from the origin of the graph and place attachment is therefore high. On the other hand, communities who visit a place for leisure purposes are "outsiders" and have low place identity. Although they enjoy visiting the place, they are not dependent on it for their existence.

Ancient and modern place attachment was therefore examined and evaluated against the background of symbolic connection (place identity) and need (place dependence) provided by Sebastian.

## THE ANCIENT BIBLICAL TEXTS

Psalm 37 and Matthew 5 (The Beatitudes) were chosen as biblical texts to examine ancient place attachment in terms of dispossessed people and inheritance. Both ancient texts are situated in contexts of injustice, where the people are attached to the land despite their lack of ownership thereof.

For Brueggemann and Bellinger (2014:183) Psalm 37 articulated a pragmatic homily on how to live when the wicked seem to prosper. The author/s of the psalm (and their allies) felt aggrieved that they did not have access to the land which was perceived as both belonging to Yahweh as well as a gift from Yahweh to the Israelite tribes. Psalm 37 encouraged the audience to trust that Yahweh would act and restore order.

Recent scholarship dates Psalm 37 as post-Exilic (Maré, 2010:267; Gillingham, 2019:412; Botha, 2020:17), containing the universal themes of conflict, injustice (poverty) and dispossession (place loss). The author of Psalm 37 was very aware of the opposing factions within the society – the "out-group" or wicked who offended the "in-group" or righteous and who were assigned a place on the side of Yahweh (Botha, 2020:4). The tensions between these two groups of people were representative of the factions within Palestine at the time.

A further layer of complexity and tension would have been added through foreign rule and occupation (Persian Empire), and the pressure from the associated taxes and tribute that were due to the foreign power. Resistance against power and longing for land were therefore significant issues in the Post-Exilic period. Psalm 37 was explored to understand the place attachment of the identified groups in terms of place dependence and place identity: the in-group's place attachment to the land despite their lack of possession, and that of the out-group to the same land, who were perceived as flaunting their "wicked" behaviour.

Some 500 years after the writing of Psalm 37, Matthew's community was almost certainly living in the aftermath of the first Jewish revolt against Rome (66-70 CE) and the subsequent destruction of the Temple by the Romans, and the dominant Temple priesthood's loss of power (Sim, 1998:2; Riches, 2005:3; Chapman, 2015:22). Despite different role-players compared to Psalm 37, the context for Matthew 5 was still one of conflict, injustice and

dispossession. Within the Mediterranean world, the whole population of the Jewish people had been weakened by a programme of public humiliation and stigmatization by the Roman authorities (Riches, 2005:3). In terms of their association with the Jews, the Christians were also persecuted, which fuelled conflict between these groups (France, 2011:906). Most scholars agree that Matthew's Gospel reflects a bitter conflict between the evangelist's community and the leading figures in emergent formative Judaism, although there is some disagreement over the details (Sim, 1998:2).

The socio-political structure was enmeshed in and secured by military and religious sanction. There were vast societal inequalities, economic exploitation and political oppression where the status system generally honoured the wealthy, powerful, Roman and provincial males and despised those of little power, wealth and status. This fuelled tensions at a number of different levels, with the extent of frustration heightened by the lack of opportunities for social improvement (Carter, 2005:150). In the light of this, the Beatitudes were subversively counter-cultural, especially in terms of the honour and shame culture of the time (Carter, 2000:130). Jesus' teaching concerned a radical, alternative and eschatological wisdom and lifestyle, where the poor, meek and persecuted were blessed, and "insiders" were given a different way of assessing what and who were false versus true. The Beatitudes offered reassurance and consolation, promising a share in the kingdom of heaven for those who knew few rewards in this earthly kingdom. For them, there was the ultimate assurance of a divine reward: to be "blessed" and saved by God (Clarke, 2003:65).

In the Beatitudes the reframing of society's understanding of the experienced hardships ascribed new meanings that facilitated eschatological interpretation. The eschatological scenarios of Jesus' blessing provided a cosmic framework in which the demise of Rome was certain. While the future reversal was assured, it was also anticipated in the present through actions of mercy, seeking and doing God's will, making peace that expressed the justice of God's purposes and not the militarily sustained domination of the Roman order, and faithfully enduring the inevitable backlash challenge to the status quo (Matthew 5:7-12) (Carter, 2005:164). The promises of a future that was inconceivable in the present circumstances resulted in a redefined understanding of place.

The inheritance was reinterpreted to encompass more than the inherited land, and geographical circle of influence from which they had been personally dispossessed, but to include all of creation in an eschatological sense. For Wainwright (2016:79), the reinterpretation of inheritance of the land (Psalm 37) to inheritance of the earth (Matthew 5:5) affirms that the author envisages earth to sustain all life, and therefore includes air, water, land and all living creatures. As the church was to expand in all the world, all the material earth was to be blessed by its presence. People were to steward and value the land on which they lived wherever in the world they were.

In terms of Sebastian's graphical representation, where place identity and place dependence are plotted, the ancient texts indicate high place attachment for the in-group of Psalm 37 and the reinterpreted eschatological understanding of the Jewish Christians of Matthew's Gospel.

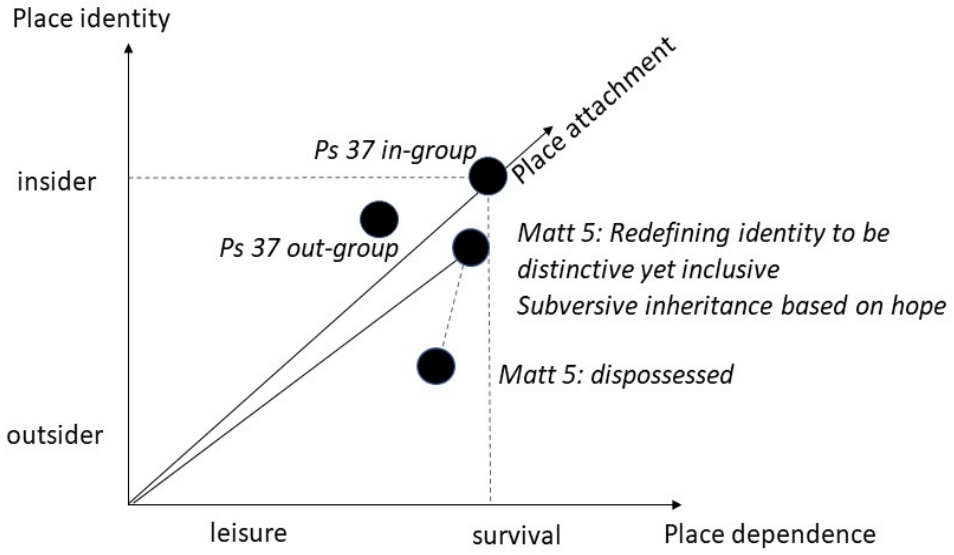


*Figure 2: Place Attachment and the Ancient Biblical Texts (Source: Author's own)*

While the out-group of Psalm 37 had possession of land, the in-group arguably had a higher place identity through intensive interpretation and regular ritualization, freighting the land with meaning – yearning for the land as their inheritance from Yahweh. The promise of land guided their behaviour and provided them with hope in their poverty. The sacred dimension of place and its natural resources contributed to high place identity, in spite of dispossession. The indication in verses 18-19 that the in-group would not suffer during times of disaster or famine indicates that because they were dependent on the land for their survival, Yahweh would look after them.

The agrarian nature of the society meant that the people used the land for subsistence agriculture. Since the majority of the inhabitants were poor, the land and climate impacted directly on their well-being. The desire and hope for land to provide for the future illustrates place dependence – the in-group were more driven in this regard than the out-group who showed disrespect towards their fellow Jews, and seemingly had alternative survival strategies. The out-group flaunted their ownership and "plotted wicked schemes" (verses 7, 12).

For the audience who listened to Jesus teach the Beatitudes, land was a place to work (even if ownership had been lost) and the threat of shame and further indebtedness meant that it should be lightly held. Jesus reaffirmed the wisdom tradition that the righteous and wise (and those who followed the Torah) formed the in-group and would be rewarded with an inheritance of land despite all odds.

Historically, the extent of geographic mobility was often restricted to the village and the nearest town, and was reinforced by the social ties of the kin-group. Despite the historic attachment to the land through genealogy, the inequality and injustice perpetuated by the Roman imperialist administration placed a heavy tax burden on the inhabitants. Status and honour were lost when people were incapable of paying off their debt or if they lost their inherited land. As a result, land was held more lightly than in Psalm 37, which increased their sense of powerlessness or "outsideness".

The redefined Christian identity (based on the Beatitudes) allowed the audience in Matthew's Gospel to claim the eschatological promises as their own. Matthew presented Jesus as the fulfilment of the Messianic promise. The hope of future fulfilment and a better life that was

different from the current experienced reality became their new identity. The Beatitudes promised divine reward for those who had little but humbly and meekly persisted in their life of faith. The reinterpretation and reappropriation allowed for an increased "insideness" and attachment wherever in the world they found themselves, thereby creating agency and the extension of the concept of sacred space over a much larger geographical area.

The increasing economic diversification (to include artisans, merchants, traders, shop owners) as a means to supplement their subsistence existence indicated that the direct dependence on the land was beginning to diminish and become more indirect. Under the circumstances of land dispossession, some of the poor (Jesus and his disciples included), adopted an itinerant lifestyle where they were not dependent on any particular piece of land for their survival, yet were very dependent on the land (and others' generosity) for their existence. Jesus' ushering in of a new eschatological kingdom in the Beatitudes provided the listeners with a new sense of place dependence that included the whole earth and the spiritual realm, compared to only the land of Psalm 37. Participation in the subversive Jesus movement was attractive to the expropriated smallholder farmers, peasant children without inheritance, and all kinds of people deprived of access to land (Häkinnen, 2016:7). As place was redefined and reappropriated, place dependence was extended to all of creation, as there was a realisation of dependence on the created world, rich in diversity and relationality, in line with the ecological hermeneutic of Wainwright (2016:73). The reinterpretation of the concept of land by Matthew's authors such as it extended to include the earth ensured that place dependence remained high within the Beatitudes.

In summary, what we can learn from the ancient texts is that although the people in the Old Testament and the New Testament were dispossessed of land, they both yearned for the inheritance of land. The search for land and meaning is not new.

The ancient texts illustrate that place attachment was historically recognised, even though land provided the means for economic subsistence. It can be argued that high place attachment, even in the absence of land ownership, provides hope, and the impact of place loss is minimised through reinterpretation. Those who were facing dire circumstances in the Post-Exilic period under the Persians or under the Roman imperialist occupation (and indeed all people since then) could lift their eyes and grasp onto hope – realising that they were part of a bigger cosmic picture. Even if they owned very little, they possessed and were responsible for God's created earth. The reinterpretation and reappropriation of place resulted in a similarly strong place attachment for Matthew's Gospel as for Psalm 37. Increased place attachment provides hope in situations of despair.

## LAND IN THE MODERN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

### Land Reform in South Africa

The first peoples of South Africa, the Khoi and the San, were nomadic foragers, and land was occupied by different groupings on a seasonal basis. Land was settled by new inhabitants on the basis of negotiation with local tribes, occupation of unoccupied areas, and through conquest and re-conquests. The colonial (and later republican) governments formalized these arrangements in legislation and title deeds, creating a land ownership system that was largely skewed in favour of the immigrants. The Natives Land Act of 1913 dispossessed and forcibly removed thousands of black families from their land, and prevented the majority of black South Africans from purchasing or occupying land. Historically, then, apart from state land and land set aside for environmental purposes, private land ownership was concentrated in the hands of the minority. The resulting patterns of land use were shaped by topography, climate, access to water and mineral resources and racially-based legislation.

The land reform programme, initiated in the early 1990s, was designed to redress the injustices of Apartheid, build national reconciliation and stability, support economic growth, and improve household welfare and reduce poverty (Integrated Planning Services, 1997:7). Land reform was perceived to be the central and driving force for rural development to supply residential and productive land to the poorest section of the rural population and aspirant farmers (African National Congress 1994:20). Democratic South Africa committed to redistribute land rights and remedy past racial injustices in order to create an opportunity for more equitable development (High Level Panel, 2017:206). Section 25(5) of the Constitution of South Africa provided for equitable access to urban and rural land for families that were dispossessed prior to 1913. Section 25(7) provided restitution for those who could show that land was lost through racially discriminatory laws and practices such as forced removals after 1913 (High Level Panel, 2017:201).

The South African Land Reform Programme had three components: redistribution, restitution and tenure reform:

- Land redistribution operated on a willing buyer-willing seller basis. Initially priority was given to the marginalized and needs of women, before the pro-poor bias was removed in order to establish a class of black commercial farmers, and then the State leased land to beneficiaries not employed by the State.
- Restitution allowed a person or community that was dispossessed of land rights due to racially-based legislation or practices after 19 June 1913, the enactment of the Natives Land Act. The economic and developmental outcomes of restitution projects have been poor, with the majority not meeting developmental objectives (High Level Panel, 2017:235).
- Tenure reform aimed to provide security of land tenure, moving away from permits towards a rights-based system where people could choose a tenure system appropriate to their circumstances (Integrated Development Planning, 1996:16-18).

The extent of place attachment is different for different components of the land reform programme and for different participants within the programme. Analysing place attachment in South Africa, is therefore complex.

There is often a high level of “insideness” amongst restitution claimants and tenure reform beneficiaries who have a particular relationship with a specific property. Beneficiaries of redistribution applications are likely to have a lower level of insideness however, as they have little connection or identification with the land. Since one of the key goals of land reform in the country is the improvement in the livelihoods of the rural and urban poor (High Level Panel, 2017:213), these beneficiaries may initially feel like outsiders until they are integrated within their new community.

Based on Sebastien’s model, where place identity is indicated in terms of “insideness” or “outsideness”, the land reform processes that involve restitution or tenure reform processes that involve restitution or tenure reform tend to have a higher level of “insideness” compared to redistribution projects. On the other hand, place dependency is more likely to be for survival purposes when the beneficiaries are poor, compared to middle-class beneficiaries who use the land reform project for leisure purposes. The graph below illustrates some of the possible relationships between place identity, place dependence and place attachment that might pertain to three fictitious scenarios in terms of the land reform programme in South Africa.

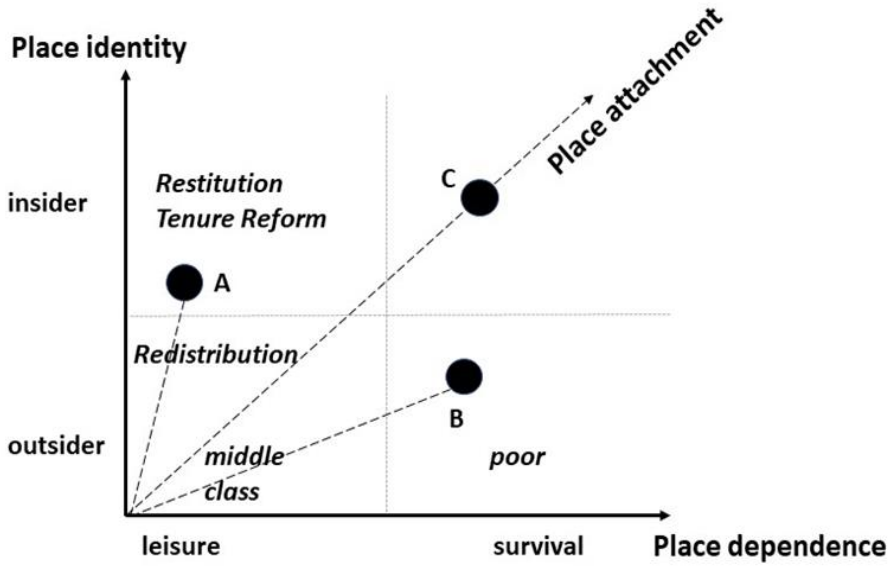


*Figure 3: Place Attachment and the South African land reform programme (Source: Author's own)*

Scenario A is represented by a land restitution project where the beneficiary is middle-class, not requiring the land for their survival, but has a strong identity with the land, based on historical and ancestral connections.
Scenario B symbolizes a land redistribution project where the beneficiary does not have the same place identity as a restitution claimant because the beneficiary is initially perceived as an outsider. However, the beneficiary is poor and dependent on the land for livelihood strategies. Like scenario A, the beneficiary also has a reasonable place attachment.
On the other hand, Scenario C depicts a labour tenant who has spent her whole life on the farm where her parents worked previously. She is poor, and dependent on subsistence agriculture to survive. Her place attachment is strong because of her high identification with the property, and also because of her complete dependence on the land to survive.
These are just three possible scenarios – in reality, the extent of place attachment would differ between individuals and communities, depending on historical linkages and the spirituality that is attached to the land.

Based on the graph, it is evident that place attachment is highest when people have connection with the land (identify with it) and are dependent on it for their survival, even if they do not have ownership of the land. For the landless who live on or below the breadline, however, access to some land is better than nothing. Access to land provides some hope, especially if the land is well located. In instances where people are expected to attach to alternative land, provision of amenities may go some way to facilitating attachment, but it is only over time that place identity can be developed.

**Critique of the South African Land Reform Process**

Bank and Hart (2019:413-414) argue that the political parties have largely ignored the real land needs of South Africans, the significance of land, and the importance of place-making and social relationships. At the outset of the land reform programme, land was largely seen as an economic asset which could be exploited, traded and exchanged. However, land reform

based on economic principles has had limited success in South Africa. The initial targets of the transfer of 30% of white commercial farming land to poor black farmers within the first five years of democracy were overly ambitious. By 1999 less than 1% had been transferred, by 2004 only 3% had been transferred and by 2013 only 6.5% of land had been transferred (High Level Panel, 2017:207-208). Other issues cited for the disappointing performance of land reform included elite capture, lack of political will and a lack of post-acquisition support and training (Makgoba 2018b). In 2016, 4.3 million hectares (out of a total of 4.7 million hectares redistributed) was out of production (High Level Panel, 2017:257). These facts illustrate that not only has the land reform process taken much longer than anticipated, but that the sustainability thereof is questionable.

One critique is therefore based on the flawed initial understanding of land as a tradeable economic asset, ignoring the extent of place identity and place dependence and therefore place attachment. It can be argued that if place identity and place dependence had been better understood, then there may have been more in-depth research into the place attachment and associated needs of the beneficiary families before awarding applications on a willing-buyer willing-seller basis (for land redistribution). High levels of place identity and place dependence are arguably valuable indicators of successful land reform, and the statistics may have been more celebratory had land been understood as more than an economic asset which can be sold on opportunistically.

It is important to note that in the last five years the understanding of land has been more nuanced: In their 2017 report the High Level Panel (2017:213) recognised the multiple meanings of land to different people, and acknowledged the diverse importance and potential impact of land redistribution in South Africa. More recently, the Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture (2019:5) has acknowledged (in theory at least) that land embodies far more than economic value, and that people belong to land as part of their social identity, culture and very existence. Land is now perceived as a resource for the community as a whole: where umbilical cords are buried, where children grow up, and where people die. It is also where people meet their ancestors in the after-life. This is now more closely aligned to acknowledging the materiality of land.

Another, but connected, critique relates to the sustainability of land reform, particularly in remote rural areas. Factors such as access to employment opportunities, education and healthcare often encourage rural dwellers to move closer to urban areas where there is limited time and space to be involved in agriculture. The productivity of land is related to geology, climate and agricultural expertise. Although rural land can sustain a family from a subsistence perspective, land reform beneficiaries do not always have the skill nor passion to use the land productively. Land is not an automatic ticket out of poverty. Without adequate agricultural support, rural land may not fulfil its agricultural potential. Bank and Hart (2019:420) argue that land reform has failed to address the needs of the poor and emerging black farmers in any significant way, with a thinly veiled attempt to reward and enrich the politically connected elites.

The spiritual connections of land were acknowledged by the Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture (2019:105) who relatively recently recognised that the land value system should recognise the spiritual needs associated with cultures and religions so that those communities that consider themselves custodians and stewards of the land can uphold the integrity and spiritual connections with the land. Land reform beneficiaries who are involved in African traditional religions are often more open to attributing spiritual relationships to the land (material religion) than those from Western faiths. Place dependence is high when the land and resource base is necessary for survival, and further heightened when the spiritual qualities of the land are recognised. As stewards of the land, beneficiaries are more likely to ensure that responsible and sustainable activities take place.

Increasingly, the government is realising the need for urban-based land reform too since the poor are not confined to the rural areas. The High Level Panel voiced their concern that there is no longer adequate provision in policy and practice for the use of land for non-agricultural purposes (both rural and urban) which are often the mainstay of poor families (High Level Panel 2017:224). In the urban context, the place (as opposed to the land per se) tends to provide the basis for survival, with multi-dimensional livelihood strategies.

In cases where the land reform process assists the poor (both rural and urban), place dependence is likely to be high, indicating survival as a basis for dependence.

On the other hand, where beneficiaries are the opportunistic and connected middle-class, the dependence on the land is not as high and the land may represent "hobby farming" – for example, farming vegetables or poultry as more of a part-time or leisure activity than necessary for survival. The drive for place preservation is less likely to be influenced by the nature of the land reform process, but rather by the personal circumstances of the beneficiaries. If the beneficiaries are poor and dependent on the land for their own survival, they are more likely to preserve the resources. Alternatively, if the beneficiary has alternative sources of incomes, they will not necessarily be so inclined to preserve the land.

In line with Place Attachment Theory, the South African land reform process should acknowledge place attachment within the processes that may include attaching to a new piece of land (for the beneficiaries) or detaching from the land (for those from whom land is expropriated, and to a lesser extent, those who choose to sell their land). It is also important that the land reform process acknowledges the real needs of the beneficiaries so that valuable agricultural land is sustainably used and issues of food security can be addressed in a context where climate change creates pressures on production.

**The Church and Land Reform**

Brueggemann suggests that the main problem in the church today is that historically, the gospel story was believed, shaped and transmitted by the dispossessed. In contrast, the church is now a church of material possession, and its understanding of land embraces an ideology that is often offended by the rhetoric of the dispossessed (Brueggemann, 2002:206).

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa is a significant landowner with roots in Christian mission and colonisation. The Anglican church received its mission land in the mid-nineteenth century as land grants from the colonial government, or directly from Xhosa chiefs, or from generous African syndicates of benefactors (Southern African Anglican Theological Commission, 1995:12). The missions that were built on the land usually consisted of "a school, hospital and church with buildings for the missionaries" and were intended to be self-sufficient in food and water (Sage, 2005). Besides evangelism, many of the church mission farms provided educational and health services to communities that would not ordinarily have had access to such amenities and as such, provided a degree of respite. The church land in South Africa does not form part of any restitution claims since the land was received prior to 1913. However, irrespective of the "cut-off date" provided in the Land Reform legislation[1], the people who were historically associated with the church mission land over the years are likely to have some attachment to it, and this should be recognised in the discussions regarding changes in access. As a landowner, the church should engage in the land issues and could meaningfully contribute to redistribution and tenure reform.

In this regard, it is important that as a landowner, the church first examines its own use of land and participation in the displacement of people before taking a stand on land reform and redistribution of land (Tsele & Butler, 2013:42). The gospel imperative requires the church to

[1] Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994

care for the marginalised (the widow, orphan, landless) and provide a voice that speaks out against injustice. The church should lead the way in critically examining its own resources in order to create opportunities to redress the morally compromised past and "secure rights to land for largely rightless inhabitants of church land" (Tsele & Butler, 2013:43). A report by Sage (2005) described the initiative of the Anglican Diocese of Grahamstown to transfer ownership of church-owned land to local people in the poorer rural areas. The church retained the church, rectory, and burial ground on each farm, and the use of the rest of the land was negotiated with the beneficiaries. Besides agriculture, the larger project also included 270 low-cost houses, a business park, and a sports complex. There has been some progress to practically engage with land issues, but there is still more that could be done. Maluleke (2008:686) notes that reparation of land is complex, but justice is necessary to heal relationships that were broken.

The church has an important role to play in leading by example. It is argued that restorative justice should give way to transformative justice where the systemic issues of unequal access to land should be addressed. Healing relationships is the first milestone in the process. It is argued that during the twentieth century the churches struggled, and often failed, to bring their practices regarding land in line with their principles, let alone influence and to apply theology to land policy (Southern African Anglican Theological Commission, 1995:12). At the beginning of the twenty-first century the church has a unique opportunity to be part of the process of transformation, especially in terms of its own land, infusing the land reform debate with the gospel values of sharing, reconciliation and healing (Makgoba, 2018a, 2018b).

**Learning from the Ancient Texts**

In the footsteps of history, access to land, or lack thereof, is inevitably a source of conflict and tension. With the recent realization within national government that land is more than just an economic entity, the church is in the unique position to offer the land reform process insights and wisdom from the ancient texts. The first point worth noting is that the biblical texts recognised attachment to land. Place Attachment Theory can explain the cognitive-emotional connections with land as described in Psalm 37 (particularly for those who feel unjustly dispossessed) and Matthew 5 (for people who through political and social circumstance are unlikely to ever own physical land). The ancient texts recognised that these emotional attachments to land existed in spite of the lack of ownership or occupation, and acknowledged that people who were dispossessed still felt attachment towards the land in question. As described above, the contexts of these ancient texts bear remarkable resemblance to the context of land reform in South Africa. Not only do the ancient texts speak from the perspective of the dispossessed, but they provide insight into the struggle for survival and acknowledge the attachment to land through both place identity and place dependence.

Theology is often driven by the ideology and perspective of the powerful. However, the ancient texts are frequently counter-cultural, focusing on the "un-people" – the members of society who are on and off the fringes of societal structures and processes (Maluleke, 2008:689). The second lesson from the ancient texts is that poor and marginalized have always been a feature of society and should be seen and acknowledged. People tend to have strong opinions about justice (Psalm 37) and seek fairness. This is the gospel imperative, especially as it applies to the underdog. For the poor and marginalised, place attachment provides hope in the context of an uncertain future, especially for those who have been dispossessed. People seek hope and may redefine and/or reappropriate place in order to find hope.

When carefully examined, the ancient texts provide wisdom for today that can guide the church as it meaningfully engages with issues concerning land. However, it is also important to embrace the lessons from the implementation of the land reform programme in order to guide the church's engagement with land, and the optimal use of the land entrusted to it.

## Lessons for the Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Based on the research of ancient texts and experiences of the modern contexts, the following lessons are offered to the Anglican Church of Southern Africa in terms of attachment to land:

### *Appreciate the Complexity of the Land and Place Attachment*

The church should acknowledge that land is storied space - embracing histories and community symbols. People belong to the land and therefore land helps construct social identity and provides dignity. Land is also the basis of group consciousness (Southern African Theological Commission, 1995:13). Place attachment provides a useful insight into the different role-players that inform the meanings ascribed to the land. As illustrated in the biblical texts, an appreciation of place identity, place dependency and place attachment should underpin the land debate, especially where the church is involved.

The church should acknowledge place attachment within the process of its land negotiations. Place attachment is important for those who will be staying on the land, so increasing a sense of insideness is important, which tends to increase place attachment. A further positive spin-off from place attachment is that there is increased opportunity for sustainable use of the land when there is high place dependency. High place attachment gives hope, even in difficult circumstances. For those who will be staying on the land, it is important to encourage both high place identity and high place dependency. On the other hand, those who will be leaving the land, will need a decrease in place attachment – through reducing place identity and place dependence. A decrease in place identity may happen over time, but participation in a negotiated future with suitable alternatives is recommended.

### *Contribute to the conversation*

For Maluleke (2013:64), the question of the church and its land is ultimately a theological one that needs to be worked out in relationship and in context. The Church has a responsibility to critically examine the use of its own land, contribute to the debate and lead by example, encouraging the local people to work out locally-appropriate solutions.

It is important to note that people who have been staying on or working on the church land are likely to have a relationship with and attachment to the land, and should be part of the transformative process of upliftment – of themselves and of the land. Buy-in increases the likelihood of increased place identity and successful implementation. High place identity through historical association and memories is likely to reflect in a commitment to locally conceived and identified strategies. For Makgoba (2018a), the importance of place cannot be ignored. Place attachment can inform the practicalities and pragmatics of land reform, e.g. taking time, and listening to stories about land which can shape how land reform alternatives are explored. The affected people need to have a voice in the future of the land, and be supported with skills development in order to steward it well. As such, the church should provide an advocacy role for those connected with church land, and could facilitate dialogue, bilateral agreements and consensus for all those affected by land issues (Resane, 2019:7).

Based on the acknowledgement that land is a gift from God to the whole of creation, it is important that the church chooses a sacramental way of relating to land as the means of existence and livelihood (Tsele & Butler, 2013:44). Land should be held lightly and reverently, allowing the land to mediate a deeper relationship with God. Following Brueggemann's (2002) analysis of the trajectory through Scripture, landedness (grasping land) leads to landlessness, and land, when received should be stewarded well and lightly held. The failure of many land reform projects illustrates how landedness can often lead to landlessness. The church has a

unique opportunity to demonstrate how a richer understanding of land and place attachment can enhance the opportunity for success of future land transfers.

### *Commitment to the Poor*

It is clear that an economic development model for land reform cannot transform land and agriculture along biblical and ethical lines. For inhabitants on church land, a dynamic of economic co-dependence often exists. Due to both global and local economic interests and ideologies, the real priorities of land reform are often directed away from the interests of the poor. The Christian Gospel is centred around the poor and those on the fringes of society, and the Church should be too. Thus, the Christian Church in South Africa should assume a prophetic role and speak for the interests of the poor (Philpott & Butler, 2004:18).

Brueggemann encourages an interface of biblical faith with the cause of the dispossessed: "The essential restlessness of our world is the voice of the dispossessed demanding a share of the land. And that restlessness is the precise echo of the biblical voice of the poor" (Brueggemann, 2002:205). However, both Maluleke (2013) and Habel (1995) argue that theology is mostly driven by the ideology of the powerful. "The church is largely a church of possession for whom the rhetoric of the dispossessed is offensive and their promise is irrelevant" (Brueggemann, 2002:206). The church has yet to face how odd and discomforting is the biblical affirmation that God wills land for God's people and God will take it away for the sake of the poor. Because the church has failed to maintain the land/landless dialectic, it is immobilised on the issue without the power to invite the landed to landlessness or to include the landless in the land. Reparation is required, with a focus on the poor. The poor should be encouraged to contribute indigenous knowledge and participate in a creative decision-making process. Encouraging collaboration serves to strengthen place attachment.

### *Focus on Sustainability*

A focus on sustainability provides an opportunity to recognise multiple livelihood strategies for individuals and communities and create increased place dependence for the poor and marginalised. While land ownership does not necessarily address poverty, access to land is a prerequisite because it provides the platform for livelihoods. Historically, land reform has focussed on commercial agricultural projects in rural areas, but it is recognised that the poor typically use multiple livelihood strategies, subsistence agriculture being only one component of food security. Urban land may, in fact, offer more livelihood options than rural land, because there is greater access to markets. Therefore, church land on the urban fringe presents a unique opportunity to explore strategic and sustainable development. In addition, the landless, poor and marginalised are often concentrated in informal settlements on the urban fringe. Land reform that addresses both the issues of sustainability and the poor should not be confined to rural agricultural projects.

The embracing of sustainability reflects reverence for the land and high place dependence. If the land is understood as a gift from God, then it is more likely to be nurtured, preserved and willingly shared with others. As stewards of God's land, the church should be at the forefront of sustainability by encouraging a respect for the earth and all living creatures.

Brueggemann quotes Wendell Berry: "any society is likely to treat its land the same way that it treats its women" (Brueggemann, 2002:xxii). When land is regarded as blessed creation, it evokes a wisdom on how to live well and responsibly in the land. With the ongoing scourge of Gender Based Violence in South Africa, the stewardship and sustainability of land is doubtful, unless there is a greater reverence for the land and commitment towards respecting human dignity, especially that of women and children.

The principle of sustainability should guide all decisions regarding the future uses of land, especially in terms of the voiceless members of society, moving beyond a rhetoric of restitution, justice and rights (Tsele & Butler, 2013:42). The contribution of local knowledge, with guidance in terms of alternative, non-traditional and high-value agricultural options is an important component of determining appropriate sustainable livelihoods.

As a significant landowner, it is important for the church to appreciate the complexity of land, contribute to the conversation, and consider its role in addressing the injustices of the poor and dispossessed, particularly those who have attachment to the land in its possession. The church also has a responsibility to model stewardship so that the land is sustainably used in order to provide for future generations. The church has the privilege to use the wisdom from understanding place attachment to address and re-evaluate the appropriate stewardship of the land it has inherited.

## Conclusion

Philpott and Butler (2004:2) contended that the Bible does not provide a blueprint for solving South Africa's land question. Indeed, the Bible does not provide a blueprint for many modern issues. However, land is more than an economic transaction. It is a social, cultural and ontological resource that has facilitated the creation of social and cultural identity over time. Land has different meanings to different individuals and also different groups of people.

The land and the people are inextricably linked and inter-dependent. Through the lens of Place Attachment, insight into the relationships between place identity and place dependency in Psalm 37 and Matthew 5 highlight the significance of place attachment and its role in understanding and resolving conflict and providing hope. A strategy to address the issue of church land necessarily needs to deal with both place identity and place dependence.

An awareness of the spirituality of the land increases place attachment and results in a greater reverence for the earth and a greater possibility of place preservation. The sustainable use of land is especially important in terms of adequately responding to climate change. Responsible stewardship of the land by the church should be key to any future land use, whether part of a land reform programme or not.

The Church has a unique opportunity to be part of the process of transformation by redressing injustices of the past, supporting economic growth and reducing poverty (Tsele & Butler, 2013:42, Southern African Anglican Theological Commission 1995:12). By directly addressing the land question, Christianity can speak out against existing inequalities (Brueggemann, 2002:205). Although the narrative of land is often driven by those in power, it is important to listen to the voices of the dispossessed, especially those who have historical connections to the land. In this regard it is important to think about how best to engage and learn from the poor and dispossessed (and voiceless). The church should lead the way as a disrupter of inequality.

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