

... And back to basics: Understanding the essence of house and home and its political consequences.

Caroline Newton¹

“I have my space where I can cook, and I have a small yard, but at least it is mine. It is mine, I can do a garden if I feel to do and persons can’t say ‘you can’t do that and don’t do this and...’ you know. Now you have your freedom.” (middle-aged woman living in a Capetownian township, expressing her feelings after becoming a home-owner)

Abstract

‘To live somewhere’ carries meaning on a number of different levels, from that of the every-day life to the broader societal context. A main body of academic work has developed around this topic. As such the aim of this paper is not to review all this theory but to address the issue from a gender perspective and to add the notions of (motherly) care and ideal-type ‘homing’ to the already complex and consequently to illustrate its consequences on the political scale.

To achieve this aim a first section shortly reviews the existing theoretical work, specifically stressing the importance of feminine and motherly values. Consequently the first notion referred to above, namely motherly care, can be addressed. Before we can discuss the second notion, that of ideal-type ‘homing’ it seems necessary to bring the empirical work (done over a period of four years in several township around Cape Town) into the debate.

Subsequently, understanding is established on how the entanglement of the notions of care (projected onto women), home-ownership and ideal-type thinking, enforces a dominant societal discourse, which only legitimises the existing power structures of a given society.

To conclude we might ask ourselves if (self)normalisation through the object of the home removes every means of questioning dominant societal or governmental discourses?

Keywords:

ideal-type thinking, theory, gender, house, home, feminism, normalisation, Foucault, South-Africa, Cape Town.

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Introduction

‘To live somewhere’ carries meaning on a number of different levels, from that of the every-day life to the broader societal context. A main body of academic work has developed around this topic. As such the aim of this paper is not to review all this theory but to address the issue from a gender perspective and to add the notions of (motherly) care and ideal-type ‘homing’ to the already complex and consequently to illustrate its consequences on the political scale.

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To conclude we might ask ourselves if (self)normalisation through the object of the home removes every means of questioning dominant societal or governmental discourses?

The meaning of home

In this first part the notions of house and home are outlined and a gender perspective added. Consequently the intention is not to provide a full overview of the meaning of house and home, instead the notions that are of importance are discussed taking into account women's positions.

Although most of the research into the meaning of housing has been carried out in a

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Western context, I argue that the meanings that are projected upon the home and the house are also important in the context of the setting of this research. Because of its specificity, South Africa cannot be looked at solely from a 'third world' perspective. Although the meanings that are attached to housing will, of course, be influenced by the different ethnic groups' traditions (e.g. Xhosa, Zulu), a very strong western influence also exists, which has its roots in the history of the country's colonisation. Today, a predominantly 'white' concept of house and home is still being projected. This image comes into the houses and shacks of almost every family in Cape Town through the medium of television, and soap operas such as "7de laan", "Generations" and "Isidingo" reinforce stereotypical thinking about the home.

How housing (re-)creates identity

Tuan (1975) quite accurately noticed that, behind their facades, modern buildings do not offer to their inhabitants any bodily and sensual pleasures or sensations of smell and touch. He argues that high-rise apartments are even worse, because the buildings' outlooks make it impossible to detect individuals' homes therein. The impression exuded from such buildings is that of an undisguised marker of low-cost social housing. Additionally the inhabitants of these dwellings are also able to accurately read the environments in which they live. I illustrate this by reproducing a quote from a Pruitt-Igoe tenant (cited in Birmingham's article (1999)):

"To a person who cannot afford the luxuries that a person can have, Pruitt-Igoe is what you might say was forced upon them. This is the last resort... Yes, the environment is very bad. If a person could get outside I'm sure he wouldn't be here. If I could get on the outside...I wouldn't be here either".

Tenants on public housing estates see themselves as inferior, and as positioned precisely as a result of their specific 'status' as tenants in the public, social, housing sector (Clapham, 2005).

In some of the cases presented in this paper, the same observation is made. People are very well aware of their position in society, and about the messages that their physical environment and their houses, or using Bourdieu's word, their habitats, are sending to the 'outside world'.

The home is an object that reveals who someone is to the outside world, as well as telling us how they live and how well they are doing. The symbolic value of the house is strongly related to the notion of status (Bourdieu, 1984, Clapham, 2005), and aspects of a lifestyle are linked to Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital. Within a given society, people with a particular lifestyle will have acquired a certain status, thereby expressing their relative success. Through their '**choice**' of housing they are showing their status to the outside world. In emphasising '**choice**' I want to point to the fact that some groups in society will indeed have a choice of housing, due to their financial capacity, whereas others have almost no choice at all, and thus have to settle for housing with a lower 'status value'.

In 'Site Effects' (1993) Bourdieu discusses the strong relationship between the structure of our social reality and the structure of physical space. A 'place' is the spontaneous symbolisation of the social space that inhabits it. Physical distances are the reflection of the distances within social space (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 123-124).

People and commodities are spread throughout physical space. The particularities of a place become apparent through the position of different layers: concentrations of goods that are scarce (and their owners) will become visible at certain sites (e.g. High Constantia in Cape Town). These places differ greatly to neighbourhoods in which there is a concentration of the deprived, together with undesirable goods and activities (e.g. Molenbeek in Brussels or Khayelitsha in Cape Town). Hence, social and economic power relationships are inscribed in physical space. However, the relationship between spatial and social structures is dialectic. This has already been argued by Doreen Massey (1979, 1984) see also Meert (2000) for an application) when she stated that successive macro-economic processes deposit and create spatial structures. These geographical structures not only overwrite each other through history, but they are also able to influence, for instance, new economic investments in certain areas. As such, physical spatial structure also influences social space.

Furthermore, Bourdieu states that this spatial influence on the social structure occurs in such a way that it is not noticed by people; it is instead incorporated in their minds through an endless confrontation with the physical spatial distances that are the reflection of the social structure of society (Bourdieu, 1993). Or, in Bourdieu's words:

"Because social space is inscribed at once in spatial structures and in the mental structures that are partly produced by the incorporation of these structures, space is one of the sites where power is asserted and exercised, and, no doubt in its subtlest form, as symbolic violence that goes unperceived as violence. Architectural spaces address mute injections directly to the body and, just as surely as court etiquette, obtain from it the reverence and respect born of distance, or better yet, from being far away, at a respectful distance" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 126-emphasis added).

Here, Bourdieu shows that the use of space, and the organisation of a city, are also tools which maintain, and even enhance, the power of the elite. Without a doubt people have, through their positions in physical space, more or less access to scarce commodities. So, there is a struggle to control space, and the outcome is settled by the capital, in all its forms (cultural, social and economic), that an actor possesses. Consequently, those lacking the necessary capital are kept at a "respectful distance" by the elite. Hence, Bourdieu stresses, in this way spatial mobility becomes an important indicator of an actor's success (Bourdieu, 1979, Bourdieu, 1999).

A 'Family business'

Quite often in the literature, notions of house and home are conflated (Mallet, 2004) and linked to notions of family life. Yet, it needs to be stressed that a house is not always a home, just as a home does not always need to be a house. A person can feel at home in different settings and a house doesn't necessarily provide the safe haven or other elements that turn it into a home. An explanation of these statements is required.

In Western conceptualisation, the home is often viewed as a place of refuge, relaxation and warmth. It is placed in opposition to the outside world, and is related to the male-female dichotomy, whereby the home is a place where the husband can retreat after a hard day's work, feeling secure in the warm family nest. Consequently, the inside of the house is the wife's domain, a place where she takes care of the children and her husband, and creates a caring and intimate space (Bachelard, 1994 (1957), Clapham, 2005, Dovey, 1985, Korosec-Serfaty, 1985, Mallet, 2004, Wardaugh, 1999, Altman and Werner, 1985).

Two important points must, however, be noted. Firstly, the dichotomies of the internal/external, female/male, private/public are not fixed, and tend to shift over time and space. Societal discourses, and shifts therein, are reflected in and through the house (Clapham, 2005).

Secondly, we have to be critical about the house as a safe haven. Feminist thinkers (Hooks, 1991, Mallet, 2004, Bowly et al., 1997, Crenshaw, 1991) have accurately argued that the house is not always the loving and caring environment it is proclaimed to be; it can also be a place of oppression and patriarchal domination. Interesting work was conducted by Gurney (1997) who found, through his ethnographic research, that although women provide a positive and emotional account of the home at first, their comments became more complex and negative as time progressed (Gurney, 1997).

What is of particular interest to me is 'why' women speak about homes in this way (at first positively and emotionally), whereas Gurney observed the opposite (men initially spoke about home in a basic and more negative way) in their male counterparts. Although Gurney doesn't provide an answer to this question, in my opinion he does suggest a starting point when talking about the inter-relationship between housing and emotions in his conclusions. He highlights how the ideas associated with home-ownership and marriage are the "*cultural and social icons of success and happy heterosexual family life*" (Gurney, 1997, p. 383).

Although the home provides some sort of security, and can become a refuge, I intend to argue that, as a result of a dominant societal discourse's norms and values, people are striving to adhere to these 'normal' lives. In particular, women, onto whom the caring norms and values are projected, internalise these 'normalising' ideas of home, and consequently make it the core of their lives. They work hard to turn their houses into homes, which are safe havens wherein they can take care of their husbands and children. Consequently, the attachment that people have to their homes, and the meaning that is projected onto them, can be used politically, as a normalising discourse, thereby creating 'docile bodies'.

A housing discourse

Attempting to provide an all-inclusive overview of the meaning of home is an almost impossible undertaking, and is far beyond the scope of this paper. The symbolic meanings attached to the home are of importance, since the house is a symbol of the Self (Mallet, 2004). For Wu (1993) the home is essential to the formation of one's identity, and he sees people's identities (the 'I') being constructed through their relationships with others, which relationships are initiated in the home: "*Home is*

*where I both was born and am being continually born, within that womb called other people, in their being **not me***" (Wu, 1993, original emphasis).

The values that are projected onto the home are those that are considered to be "good" in the dominant public discourse. These forms of discourse, which separate the 'good' from the 'bad', support a normalising approach in which 'good' behaviour is applauded and 'bad' behaviour disciplined. Once more, this shows how our actions and thoughts are influenced by normalising processes. Relevant research has been carried out by Fiona Ross (2005). In her study of an informal settlement in the Western Cape ('the parc'), she reveals how its residents (of Xhosa origin) imagined a 'proper' home as being something that is associated with middle-class 'stereotypes' thereof. When these same inhabitants discovered that they were about to be given proper houses in a nearby planned residential area ('the village'), an open discourse began around the meaning of the new homes. The residents believed that they now had an opportunity to live as 'ordentlike mense' or 'respectable people'. Accordingly, for them there was a strong association between properly built houses and a respectable family life, which was in contrast to the stigmatisation they had experienced when living in a shack (Ross, 2005). I must stress that 'home' or the idea of 'home' can become a projected 'stereotype' onto which hopes and dreams are projected, potentially making it a powerful concept. Additionally are these meanings often associated with family life (Bowly et al., 1997, Clapham, 2005, Jones, 2000, Mallet, 2004). They can be, and often are, used by the political elite to impose norms and values upon populations. As such, ideas about the house, home, and family, support a 'normalising' process through which people 'subject themselves' to a dominant discourse which ensures that they take part in society.

Giddens showed that in a post-modern society, people are losing their sense of purpose in life as well as their sense of belonging. He also stresses that a home can become a place wherein 'ontological security' can be realised. As such, the home reassures people that our social world is as it should be, and that our own identity is safely assured within it. In the privacy of the home, the inhabitants can rebuild their trust in the world, thereby securing their 'being-in-the-world' (Clapham, 2005, Dupuis and Thorns, 1998, Giddens, 1984, Giddens, 1990).

The home is the place where parents raise their children with love and care, it is the place where norms and values are passed to the children (Altman & Werner, 1985; Clapham, 2005). It is the place where a significant part of a child's socialisation occurs. Accordingly, it is an important element in the reproduction of the social world.

Motherly Care

The first concept requiring our further attention is the notion of 'care', another central concept in people's lives, and yet its influence is exercised more covertly. In the West, much research about the care concept have been conducted into aspects of the health care sphere, such as nursing, or in relation to paid health care or the more general care of the elderly (Fine, 2007, Gordon and Chase-Lansdale, 2001, Kane, 1995, Sabatino, 1999).

Feminists have also discussed the issue, often in relation to motherhood, noting the

association of motherhood and child rearing with women's confinement to private spheres. Chodorow (1978) has provided important insight, highlighting both how the concept of 'motherhood' is socialised within the home, and why the concept of the family has been able to remain so strong over time (Chodorow, 1978, Den Yyl, 1995). Criticism followed because Chodorow started from the perspective of a typical Western 'nuclear family'. Nevertheless, in most cultures a strong division of labour between men and women exists, and the allocation of work is related to gender (Eriksen, 2001). This is also true for the cases mentioned in this paper. A lot has been written about these divisions of labour in Western and Southern contexts, and a scale of appreciation, or status, has often been attached to different types of work. The perception of these status-differences has been contested in a pre-colonial, pre-modern, Africa (Sudarkasa, 2005). Several authors have shown how labour has been appreciated differently, contributing to a downward spiral in status. In the US in particular, people working in sectors that involve 'caring' for others see their statuses devalued, and there is a negative attitude to the notion of 'care' in general (Glenn, 1992, Glenn, 2000). Although these insights are of interest, within this paper I intend to focus on the question of **why** this notion of care is so important in relation to the home.

To find an answer, a more detailed look into its meaning is essential. Although Fine (2007) argues that care is a social phenomenon and, as such, its specific meaning and form changes over time and space, he also acknowledges that it is "*a concept and an ideal that refers to both intangible affective/cognitive elements, and to observable, material actions which have clear consequences for each party involved*" (Fine, 2007). This definition provides a good starting point for the further exploration of the concept. Levinas (1985) stresses that taking care of the 'other' is a moral obligation, and is something that is not naturally within us, but requires stimulation (Lavoie et al., 2006, Levinas, 1985). Levinas focuses on the relationships we have with others, relationships which begin from the first moment we lay eyes on one another. According to Levinas (1985) it is through the other's face, in particular his (or her) eyes that a relationship of responsibility emerges. Whereas this responsibility could be evaluated as confining our own freedoms, for Levinas (1969) this it is not the case. He states that "*the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness*" (Levinas, 1969, quoted in Lavoie et al.). Although acknowledging that it is demanding, Lavoie et al. (2006, p229,) argue that this moral obligation is important in "*our societies, where relationships are dehumanized*". What I find of specific interest is the connection of the notion of care to 'goodness', which again brings us to the normalising power of 'dichotomies'. White (1960) draws our attention to the consequences of associating care, or being careful, with being good, even highlighting that this association has judicial consequences; a careless person is regarded as someone who hasn't done what he was supposed to have done, and is thus disapproved of, since our judgement is "*often strengthened by the social fact that we approve of actions which do not injure others and disapprove of those that do*" (White, 1960, p. 273). Thus, care is primarily regarded as something positive, something good.

A second, and even stronger association, is that of care with the feminine. Gilligan's

(1982) influential work deserves our attention. In her book 'In a Different Voice' she criticised the work of Kohlberg (1958), who designed a scale with which to evaluate the stages of moral development in young people. At the highest stage, moral judgements are based upon the personal interpretation of 'universal' and 'abstract' principles. Kohlberg argued that girls often don't reach this stage, and are usually 'stuck' at a place in which moral judgements are based upon societal expectations and personal relationships. Gilligan (1982) went on to demonstrate that the set-up of Kohlberg's research was seriously biased, as his scale was designed in experiments only involving men. Indeed, she went on to show that women, when confronted with a moral dilemma, made decisions based on their relationships with others. As such, they are not thinking 'less morally' but 'differently', and 'contextually'. Women will try to assess the different consequences of the available options presented to them by the moral dilemma. While women will use this assessment to make a judgement, men, on the other hand, will make an abstraction of the context to form a judgement (ten Dam and Volman, 1995). Within this context, the relational and moral orientation of care is highlighted again, and the attachment to the feminine is explained.

To try to understand the relationship between home and care, Isable Dyck's research (2004, , 2005), is noteworthy. She demonstrated how the every-day lives of women are related to socio-economic factors on a larger scale, and how care is still primarily provided in the environment of the private house. In our Western context, care has been institutionalised, and the care of children or the elderly can be provided by professional caregivers within the privacy of their own homes. Dyck (2005) explains how, despite these dynamics, a conventional, gendered division of labour still gives form to policy and expectations. Consider her example of a Mexican woman, who is employed to care for the children of an American family. While this woman is out, taking care of other people's children, she passes the care of her own onto her eldest daughter. Thus, a 'chain of care' emerges, and according to the research conducted by Hyams (2003), this inter-generational redistribution of care increasingly confines young women to the home, or as Hyams phrases it, they become "*homebodies*" (Dyck, 2005, Hyams, 2003).

Dyck (2005, p. 240) argues that the "*unseen*" world of care remains predominantly a female activity. Moreover, she stresses that in a developing context, because levels of state support are often minimal, the crucial provider of care is the extended family, and specifically the women within it.

Through her analysis, Dyck (2005, p. 239) shows how the classical idea of women, home and care can be contested. The organisation of family life is influenced by macro-economic processes (see the example of the Mexican women) and, as such, is not a static, cultural given. Yet, as she accurately argues, this doesn't change the fact that women's obligations in their everyday experiences are not changing, and the women continue to be confined to the private realm of the house, taking care of their family members.

It has already been argued that *the discourse of home* is an efficient *normalising*

mechanism. People try to fit into their society, and do so by complying with dominant discourses such as those about the home and the related notion of family. In this section I have identified how the discourse of care is an equally important ‘normalising’ discourse. I will also argue that the entanglement of the notions of home and family, and care and the feminine on the other, reinforce each other. Let me explain this statement using Gilligan’s analysis. Gilligan shows how women make decisions with the ‘other’ in mind (following Levinas), and will thus take care of that ‘other person’. Add to this the fact that, around the globe, women are primarily seen as the people responsible for child rearing, and this responsibility is optimally (following the dominant societal discourses in the context of this paper) exercised within the privacy and safety of the home. Consequently, the house is regarded as being important to the provision of the best possible care for a family’s children. This goes some way towards helping us to understand the boundless energy that women invest in providing this care.

Concluding remarks and the centrality of home-ownership

As shown above, the home is a central concept in people’s lives and has meaning on a number of different levels. The most basic, and strictly material and functional meaning, is that of the house as a shelter, which offers us physical protection. In times of crisis, or when people are homeless, this primary meaning will be of particular importance, but once this basic need has been realised, the additional levels of meaning become of greater significance. Not only does a house provide a point of attachment to its broader surroundings, it is also the place wherein we can further develop our identity and status. As such, it also has social and psychological meanings. An additional element is the economic level, since activities which generate income can be developed within and from the house. These can be of significance for the survival strategies of the poor communities, especially in a third world context.

However, one final and crucial element is missing, which is an element that, according to Rakoff (1977), “*completes and underlies the earlier ones*”, namely ownership. His research revealed how people emphasise the necessity of home-ownership in order to realise the other meanings attached to the home, such as refuge, status, and security. This is true for both home-owners and those who rent property. Rakoff noticed how this notion of ownership was often talked about in terms of ‘*freedom*’, which could range from the *freedom to change things* to *freedom from the control of people in the outside world*. The private spaces in one’s own house are the sites wherein self-fulfilment can be attained. In people’s minds it is the ownership of their house that will enable them to be successful in realizing their dreams and expectations about their homes. Other research has also pointed to the significant meaning of home-ownership (Allan and Crow, 1989, Clapham, 2005, Gurney, 1997, Gurney, 1999, Rowlands and Gurney, 2001). Through policy and media, a discourse about ownership being the correct or ‘good’ form of tenure is being reinforced. Numerous examples can be found to illustrate that home owners, in adhering to the norms and values of a society, are the perfect citizens, whereas those in social (rental) units are stigmatised. Ownership is related to success and status, while rent, and specifically public rent, is linked with pejorative notions such as ‘the social classes’ and ‘those marginal people’ (Clapham, 2005, pp. 146-147).

Another important aspect of home-ownership relates to Parnell and Hart's (1999) statement about social engineering. People in a particular society try to comply with existing norms and values, in this case home-ownership. The notion of home-ownership is also associated with values of family-life and child rearing. These are two goals to which people strive, and a great deal of effort, including financial, goes into achieving them. This also means that work is needed to keep their 'capital investments' safe. I reproduce De Decker's (2004, p. 152) citation of Rapaport (1995) to illustrate this point:

"It takes a lot of loving to make a house a home, not to mention a substantial down payment and 30 years of monthly ones".

Consequently, people have to step into society's treadmill to make sure that they can create enough stability in their lives to be able to keep up with the financial burdens of home-ownership. The political consequences are self-evident. Home-ownership creates submissive citizens, from whom the ruling classes do not expect resistance. It is obvious that such a 'normalising' discourse is reinforced by government policies (De Decker, 2004, p. 134).

These thoughts bring us back to Rakoff's research (1977), which concluded that people's adherence to the ideological meanings of home and ownership, and the externalisation of these meanings, help to sustain the continuity of the ideology and its social institutions. Thus, by their day to day activities, people help to reinforce the existing structures in society. Rakoff also pointed to the "*sad*" fact that most of his respondents had not found the fulfilment they had hoped to achieve through home-ownership. For Rakoff an important lesson is learnt; the presumed existence of a "*means of synthesis*", in this case a material solution that is the house, is no guarantee that such an answer will be successful, "*even on the ideology's own terms*" (Rakoff, 1977, p. 103).

Housing + care = ideal-type homing? Understand theory through every day practice.

Setting the scene, introducing the cases

The city of Cape Town is to be found at the southern tip of South Africa and has developed on the slopes of the famous Table Mountain. It is one of South Africa's oldest and fastest growing urban regions. Today the city houses almost 3 million people, almost 50% of them are coloured, while 32% are black and 19% white.

The segregated city of today is apartheid's legacy. The conscience segregation of people according to race has resulted in a spatial layout where the relation with one's racial and socio-economic position is clear. The more affluent neighbourhoods are to be found on the slopes and nearest to the CBD.

The sandy dunes, which surround the city, commonly known as the Cape Flats or the Flats, are the home of the poor coloured and black communities. It is here that the four neighbourhoods in which I have conducted my doctoral research are situated.

The township of Wesbank was one of the first post-apartheid developments, as such the community is a very mixed one. The site was developed in phases and the 25000 inhabitants had to wait for several years for schools and other public amenities. The open spaces are left for what they are, the few play grounds are dirty, unused and unsafe. People have fenced off their properties

The Victoria Mxenge neighbourhood is a small area near the townships of Gugulethu and Nyanga and is the result of a unique initiative of Xhosa women building their own houses. Centrally located in the area is the community centre, where people meet daily and community's issues are discussed. The houses are unique and the area has been greened by its inhabitants.

Netreg on the other hand houses a predominantly coloured population. The development was the answer to the enormous need for housing in the surrounding communities, where every property had several backyard shacks often used to house the extended family's members. With the help of the DAG (Development Action Group) and the Irish Philanthropist Niall Mellon they succeeded in building 47m2 houses with tiled roofs and hot water geisers.

Freedom Park is, or should I say was, a squatter settlement or informal settlement at the fringes of Cape Town. Here, as well as in Netreg, the community got assistance from the DAG in their housing struggle. The DAG organised workshops and training courses, helped the community in their negotiations with government and also introduced them to Niall Mellon, who agreed to assist the community. In 2007, 1300 Irish volunteers came to Freedom Park to construct 200 houses in 7 days. All of the houses will have solar panels and the community will also have a play area and vegetable garden. During my visit however people were still living in shacks, but the infrastructural work had already started.

Data gathering

The data used for this paper is part of the larger dataset that was gathered for my PhD, it was gathered during a number of distinct periods between 2005 and 2007.

From the very beginning, the intention of this research was to try to **understand how and why** certain neighbourhoods, in which a housing project was either underway or had been realised, succeed in empowering their inhabitants. Therefore, the study had no intention of being representative and qualitative research methods were used.

A total of 54 in-depth interviews were conducted in the four neighbourhoods studied. Two of these interviews were with men, and two of them were within groups (one in Netreg, and one in Freedom Park). The data gathered during the first fieldwork period, namely that from Wesbank and Victoria Mxenge, was focused more on gaining an understanding of the existence of networks and organisational structures, whereas the data gathered in Netreg and Freedom Park was related more to the residents' daily lives and personal experiences.

The information gathered also tended to depend on how well interviews were going and what the women wanted to talk about. The nature of the respondents selected to participate was seriously affected by the way I was introduced to the community. The consequences of this are critically discussed in the thesis.

Data analysis

The nature of the research and the questions at hand make the choice for critical discourse analysis an obvious one. Discourse analysis emerged during the late 1960s as an interdisciplinary practice, which was influenced by several disciplines including the humanities, and social sciences, such as linguistics, anthropology, and sociology (Van Dijk, 1988). Since then, discourse analysis has become commonly used in many other social science domains, but it wasn't until Beaugrand's 1993 book 'Voices of Decline', that it came to the fore within urban studies (Boyle and Rogerson, 2001, Lees, 2004).

Because of its broad application, numerous definitions of discourse analysis can be found. I start on the basis of Hajer's (Hajer, 1995, Hajer and Uitermark, 2008) conceptualisation. For him discourse analysis is "*an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations through which meaning is allocated to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduces in an identifiable set of practices*" (Hajer and Uitermark, 2008). This integration of both discursive and social practices (Macleod, 2002) lead me on to Foucault's conceptualisation of discursive practices.

Foucault

In 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' (1972) Foucault shows that "*'discourses', in the form in which they can be heard or read, are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, coloured chain of words*". He argues that the task we should set for ourselves "*consists of not - of no longer treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that **systematically form the objects of which they speak***" (emphasis added). Thus, through the use of language, meaning is attached to social phenomena, but these phenomena are not merely being described, since through the discourse, significant meanings are attached to them. Because of this, discourse also reproduces the social phenomena it is "*talking about*". When we reflect back on the meaning of housing, and the work of Rakoff discussed earlier, this becomes very clear.

Foucault's interest in discourse is obvious. The relationship with power and knowledge is clear. When we are cautious about the discourses present in a society, we are able to understand the relationships between the actors and the *regimes of truth* that are produced. Every society has its own regimes of truth. Norms, values and discourses that are considered to be the legitimate ones, and which organise and normalise society. These are articulated by those who are regarded as being authorised to do so. Thus, discourse is able to (re)produce power relationships.

Discourse Analysis in this paper

This paper is grounded in the knowledge that by working from a rigidly framed definition of discourse, analysis will not be useful. Instead discourse analysis is approached as a way to understand why people are talking (or acting) about certain matters in a specific way. What is their motivation for doing so, are there hidden assumptions that influence their thinking, which are then reflected in their speech? Discourse analysis is used to investigate if dominant norms and values are dispersed within the actions, and within the habitus of certain groups, even if these norms are in

fact oppressing them.

I partly follow Macleod's approach, relying on both Foucault's and Parker's notions of discourse (Macleod, 2002, p. 21), but I emphasise that a discourse is more than mere text; it is also the gestures that accompany it, or it can be the act that is a consequence of it (consider the actual placement of a white picket fence, which is the translation of a societal discourse). Accordingly, I strongly adhere to Foucault's notion that a discourse is *a practice that systematically forms the object of which it speaks*. Taken together, this leads to the following working definition: Discourses are practices (mostly formed in texts); they are a coherent system of meaning about objects, containing subjects, and while aware of other discourses they reflect on their own phrasing within a historical and geographical context.

Let us elaborate on this. I will start with a quote from one of the women in one of the neighbourhoods studied:

“What must I do to become a proud home-owner, there is a lot...” (V027, 41 years, Netreg)

This comment comes from a woman of 41, who has 5 children. Only her husband is in employment, while she is active in the housing association in Netreg. She was an activist for 18 years, and has participated in several workshops. In her quote she, as the subject, positions both herself and the other beneficiaries of the dwellings. Now that she has become a home-owner, she portrays herself as being different, because with this title comes responsibilities and a different attitude. She later comments that other beneficiaries will need to be *educated* about this issue, as if the duties attached to home-ownership are regarded as being on a *higher level*.

Of course, precisely who is speaking about home-ownership needs to be borne in mind. Is it the owner of a house, a government official, or a politician? In what way is the speaker entitled to make such claims? How true are the remarks? To which hierarchical structures is one being subjected? Is this person speaking from an institutional setting or not? This positioning of the subject also reveals his or her relationships with other people or groups in society (Foucault, 1997 and Macleod, 2002).

The object of the quotation above is the house; more specifically the privately owned house around which a societal discourse is constructed. In just the short sentence set out above, it is quite clear how important the issue of home-ownership is. Suddenly someone is classified in a different way; you become *proud*, and *responsible*. Moreover, without actually saying so, this woman is negatively contrasting a proud and successful home-owner to someone who is not. This brings us on to a comment made by Foucault about the unspoken: “*The manifest discourse, therefore, is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say...*” (1977). Accordingly, it is also important to analyse these hidden messages, which might actually tell us more than the spoken word.

The coherence within a certain discourse is to be understood as the general, societal agreement about certain issues. In my example, this is the house. Foucault's *regimes*

of truth are again relevant, as is the final aspect of the historical and geographical context of the discourse. We should ask ourselves “*how it is that one particular statement appeared rather than another?*” (Foucault, 1977). Within the context of this paper, it can be argued that the norms and values which were important during colonial times, and were enforced during apartheid, are still influencing and framing the discourse about the meaning of home-ownership in South African society.

At certain times, one particular discourse can be contested or enforced by another. In the case of the house, the inter-relationship with the discourse on care will be made clear in what follows. Understanding which discourses are dominant, and how they are being sustained, enables us to comprehend the power relationships that are present in a given context.

Analysis

In this analysis I will work from the concepts care and home-ownership discussed earlier towards the ideal type thinking about house and home, using critical discourse analysis, which is explained above.

Discourses on Care

When considering the women’s discourse regarding the notion of care, I shall distinguish between the general care of the house the household, and their specific concern for the children.

The majority of the women stay in their houses for most of the day. They clean daily and do some washing. In that respect, they are taking care of their families, and provide them with a clean home. Yet we must also look at this from a more critical standpoint. These women have no choice but to stay at home, since transport is too expensive, as are outings with their children. Their daily routines reflect their ‘empty’ lives, sitting at home, reading a book, watching TV, and cleaning. It is also a way for them to keep busy:

“If I’ve nothing to do I rest on my bed and read books.” (X2, 25 years, Wesbank)

“I get up at six, prepare my husband’s sandwiches and then I prepare the kids for school. Around 8 I walk them to school and then I go back, clean my house and then I relax on my couch, watch TV or read.” (A1, 28 years, Wesbank)

“I rest on my bed and watch TV; that is what I do on an ordinary day” (V016, 36 years, Freedom Park)

“Monday is my washing day and then I do my ‘housing’ and on Wednesday I turn out my house properly because... Wednesday is my ‘turn-out’ day... and then I wash again on Friday for the weekend. And cooking food, in the afternoon, cooking food, I’m so busy...” (V027, 41 years, Netreg)

The last woman's over emphasis of her busy week is a sad illustration of how these women try to give meaning to their lives, and how they try to get through their days by making sense of their daily routines, as if these are fundamental necessities, without which life would be problematic.

The only two groups who were engaged in more than cleaning their houses, were the women who were actively involved in the community, as leaders or volunteers, and the women in Victoria Mxenge. There, all the women, including the pensioners, were actively involved in a number of activities, such as the beading project in the community hall, or even activities outside of their neighbourhood:

“On Tuesday and Friday I go to Khayelitsha to attend the training for traditional healers.” (V4, 62 years)

“I work but one day a week I am in school, I follow a course in communication and accounting, which is organised by my union.” (V2, 38 years, man)

The leading ladies in Victoria Mxenge are very active in attending meetings, and looking for job opportunities. Another girl, acting on her own initiative, organises dance lessons in the street for the children. The overall feeling in the neighbourhood is that of a pro-active group trying to take charge of their lives, which is very much in contrast with, for example, Netreg, where, despite the housing project, people are very passive, and unable to act or to change their community:

“The only NGO that helped us was DAG. None other, no other, you know. ... And our biggest problem is waiting. We are waiting and waiting and waiting: you can't just pick up a phone ... you don't even have money to phone so how will you phone those people. And if you phone someone, 'now call this one' 'now that one'. They just push you around, push you around, push you around and you end up again in the same place where you where started.” (V025, community leader)

The people in Netreg lack the necessary capacity to change things in their neighbourhood; they do not know how to turn ideas into reality, and they rely on outsiders to assist and encourage them.

The notion of care is a given in the daily lives of the women in the Cape Flats. The responsibilities that are projected onto them are not to be underestimated. The families are totally dependent upon the mothers:

“And also most of the families here are women, you know, the mothers are the breadwinners, the mothers are the heads of the families here. And also the woman is the one that has to take care of the family, the men don't, you know, they are not so worried about getting everyone in its own place, about where are they going to sleep, what are they going to eat. Yes men are working, yes they give the salary, but the women have to do all the other things, without them bothering, you know.” (V031, community leader in Netreg)

Women not only have to make sure that there is bread on the table, but they also try to provide their children with a place to sleep. They cannot rely on their husbands. During my first interviews, when a woman told me that her husband wasn't working, I asked if he helped her with the children by taking them to school or feeding them, for example. Most of the women just laughed, and explained that they cannot depend on their husbands for support.

A prominent feature in my conversations with the women were the children. In one way or another, they emphasized the importance of decent housing for their children. They did this by indicating how things had changed for the better for them (Netreg), or how they are trying to keep them safe (in Wesbank and Freedom Park). In Victoria Mxenge, the women's views were more balanced, because they knew that they had already provided their children with a better living environment and more opportunities for the future, while at the same time acknowledging the lack of some amenities for them.

The women's intense struggles in Netreg, Freedom Park and Victoria Mxenge have taken a long time. In some cases, the original beneficiary of a house had died and their children are now living in the house. While most of the women started the initiatives when they were still very young, or had just one child, many of them now have several children or are even grandmothers. They have developed a rationality which is focussed on the long term, and not merely on their own immediate needs. In Wesbank, this discourse was absent, and the women were concentrating on their day to day survival. Only three of the respondents there clearly stated that they wanted to stay to fight for a better future; all the others stressed either that they would leave, or that they were unable to leave, but, at the same time, they were not actively trying to change their situation. In the other three neighbourhoods, the women made it clear that the struggle was worth fighting, not for themselves but for future generations:

“I want a bright future for my son.” (V2, 38, man, Victoria Mxenge)

“And they are busy building in the back, we are so excited, you'll never believe us... because this house will one day be for my children, we have to leave it for them if we pass away, they must also live on, so we keep it for them.” (V014, 34, Freedom Park)

Accordingly, I would argue that personal involvement in the developments, whether in the form of significant struggles for over 15 years, or the engagement in self building, created a shift in the women's perspectives, away from every-day survival to trying to make progress in the long term. The key question, namely how this enthusiasm can be maintained and reinforced, needs further research, because it is also clear that, after very intense struggles, fatigue starts to play a part, which was particularly obvious in Netreg when compared to Victoria Mxenge. Whether this relates to the length of time involved was beyond the scope of this research. However, it would be useful for NGOs to investigate at what point a community makes a shift from 'survival' to 'progress' in their discourse and actions, and how these shifts can be acted on to help communities fight deprivation.

On the importance of home-ownership, its normalising effect and the projection of an ideal-type

Looking at the interviews conducted in Netreg we can see that ownership was mentioned as being a significant difference to their previous accommodation, and the notion of freedom was unmistakably connected to this concept:

“And here we can watch TV, I have my space where I can cook and I have a small yard, but at least it is mine. It is mine, I can do a garden if I feel to do and persons can't say 'you can't do that and don't do this and...' you know. Now you have your freedom.” (V025, Netreg)

The woman speaks about several elements of freedom, in the same way that they were explained by Rakoff (see earlier). Firstly, she connects it to the fact that she owns the house, speaking about 'my space' and 'it's mine', then stressing how she can change things as she pleases, finally emphasizing that no-one can tell her what to do and what not to do.

As well as the idea of freedom, another important element the woman referred to was pride. All of the women were proud of their houses, and connected this feeling to home-ownership, albeit with obligations. Thus, here the normalising effect of ownership is illustrated. Because of ownership, the women have to adhere to certain norms and values which are being externalised in their actions, e.g. painting the house, starting a garden, putting up a (picket white) fence:

“You can open the morning your own bedroom, you can go to your own toilet, you can move around in your own house and yard, we didn't have this before, but we are glad for what we have today. And for me as a home owner, I got my home proud, because previous I didn't have it, because I didn't know what did it, but now I got my own pride, because as women I can wait back in the morning and clean my house I can do stuff every day, washing my house ...you are free, your children are free ...” (V027, 41 years, Netreg)

With home-ownership comes both pride and responsibilities:

“What must I do to become a proud home-owner, there is a lot...” (V027, 41 years, Netreg)

This connection, between ownership, pride and responsibility, might help us to understand why the utopian idea of collectivities, and collective living with shared obligations, doesn't seem to work. It seems that the opportunities to express individuality and to achieve some status, are more likely to encourage working together and to build a sense of community rather than it is the case in (forced) collectivities.

The most surprising discussion I had was with a woman in Freedom Park, who explained to me that the forthcoming houses would lead to a lot of changes, and that things would become more difficult as a result. She clearly understood the obligations that came with owning, and thus maintaining, a house:

“It will be different, because then we will have to go work, pay our rents, it won’t be as easy as it is now... At this moment it is easy, because there is no water to pay, no bills to pay.” (V017, 36 years).

Again, this is a good illustration of something mentioned before. By becoming a home-owner, this woman will have to make sure there is money to pay the bills, meaning that she will have to step into the mainstream of society, and comply with all its do’s and don’ts, and try to achieve a ‘normal person’s life’. In making this choice, her options for radical behaviour and opposition to the government’s policies are being reduced. As such, people are not only submitting themselves to the dominant discourse, they are also reaffirming it.

Until now, I have tried to show how the entanglement of the notions of care (projected onto the women) and home-ownership enforce a dominant societal discourse, which only legitimises the existing power structures. But one other aspect must be added to complete the picture and obtain a better idea of why women go to such great efforts to access a house. It is my argument that this is because the house has become an ideal which, in their imaginations, will help them to realise all of their aspirations and dreams.

The ideal-type

“One day I will be in my house with my children, and then I’m fine.”
(V011, 38 years, Freedom Park)

The above quote sharply illustrates the points I want to make in this final section. The women’s longing for a house has created the projection of an ideal home. Using the work of Bachelard, I argue that we all have an image of a dream house, even though it might be made up of quite different, even contrasting elements. “... *(T)he dream house must possess every virtue*” Bachelard (1994, p. 65) argues, thus making it impossible to achieve it, because once a house is realised, it becomes a finalised object:

“For a house that was final, one stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts - serious, sad thoughts - and not to dreams.”

As soon as our projected fantasy image materialises, and as soon as we start to live in it, we become aware that our dreams have not become reality. We can compare this to a little girl’s dream about the knight in shining armour, a fairy tale which, once the girl has grown up, fades into real life experiences.

Bachelard (1994, p. 65) makes an important suggestion:

“Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact, that we shall not have time to achieve it.”

Even if we live in a house, we can imagine ourselves building another one later in life.

In our Western world we see that people often move more than once and, thus, Bachelard's suggestion of maintaining the idea of a future dream house is not unrealistic. However, the situation for the people living in the neighbourhoods studied is somewhat different.

The women are very well aware of the fact that this house they have just acquired will be the only one that they will ever live in. Whether they like it or not, the fantasising is over for them and a future dream home is no longer an option. This observation has two important consequences.

Firstly, the projected dream house will have to be perfect in all respects because they know it will be their only chance. This means it must not only be big enough, it must also have all the necessities to live a comfortable life, with a nice garden and enough space for every family member to have some privacy. But as well as the simple material aspects, these women have already formed an idea of how different their lives will be in the new houses. They have therefore created an image which cannot possibly meet their expectations.

And this brings us on to the second point, the disappointment. Rakoff's (1977) conclusion, that most of his respondents hadn't found the fulfilment hoped for through realising a house, is reaffirmed in this research. But while his respondents used metaphors of "*the open road, going back to the land ... to express their desire for a more fulfilling, freer future*" (Rakoff, 1977, p.103), this wasn't the case with mine. Maybe Rakoff's respondents are following Bachelard's suggestions, whereas the women in the Cape Flats know that they cannot keep on dreaming.

In Netreg, these considerations became very clear. After the completion of the dwellings, and once people started living in them, they soon experienced problems. Yet even in their complaints, the women still indicate that they are happy because they know where *they came from*...

"But what is my problem with this housing project? It's a PEOPLE's housing project. But there was no people from Netreg involved to.... Even the design of this houses was never, the design... I don't know from where came the design..... I'm satisfied with my house, because where do I come from?" (a former community leader during a group session)

"We are waiting for the inspector, there are a lot of problems in the houses and they did promise last week to come today, and we are waiting. ...they did promise last week to come today and there is a lot of sewerage problems, the toilet is leaking, there are a lot of problems in the house. And they promised to come today but I don't know if they will come. Now they only make empty promises and not coming." (V032, 34)

These women, who have been fighting for over 15 years, now have to face the fact that, unlike in Victoria Mxenge, the solution that was intended to give them a new start in life isn't the "*England*" hoped for. This might help us to understand why a lot of them are withdrawing from public engagements, and why they are keeping to themselves, especially former leaders:

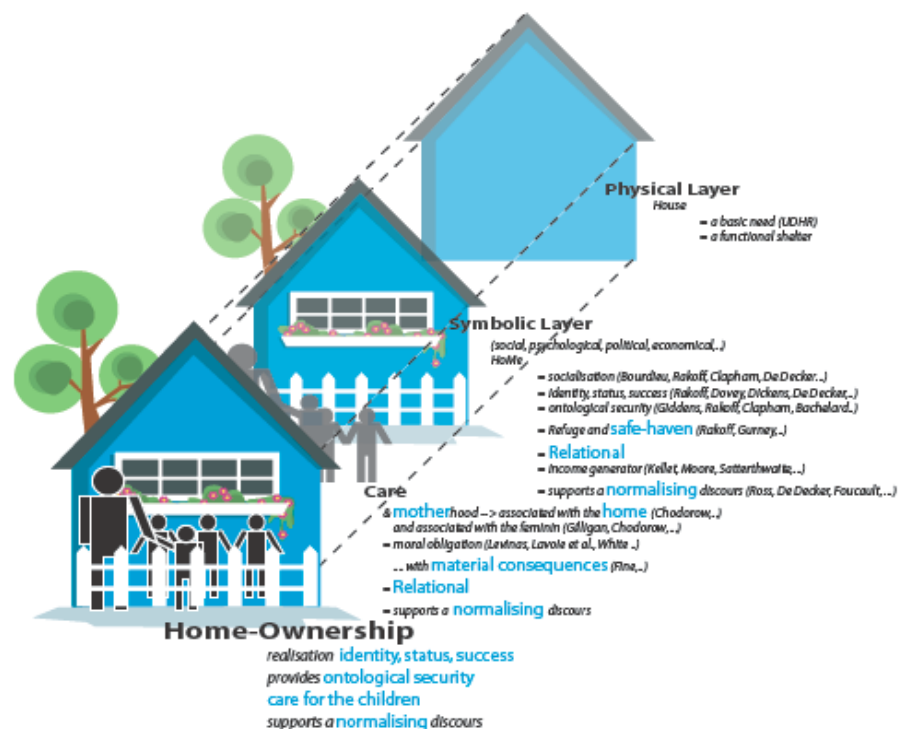
“You don’t get a thing like a good friend anymore, because in the time we’re living, people are only friends to get something. I’ve been hurt a lot of time to know what kind of people are outside...” (V025, Netreg)

But this rather pessimistic picture isn’t completely true in the case of Victoria Mxenge. Here, the ‘leading ladies’ still control everything and engage in new initiatives. None of the respondents in Victoria Mxenge felt any sense of disappointment about the houses they were able to acquire. I am convinced that this is because of the personal involvement they had in every step of the process, both in the decision making as well as in the actual construction.

Housing, enforcing normalisation ... no means of resistance?

As shown through theory and empirical work the discourse of house and home serves a strong normalising discourse. If we look at the figure (see fig. 1) that synthesises both notions and emphasises the centrality of home-ownership some contemplation is needed about the possible means of resistance that might still exist (or not?).

Fig. 1 Synthesising the notions of house and home and the centrality of Home-ownership.



It has been emphasised that the strong interrelation between the home as a safe-haven on the one hand and the motherly care for the children on the other is a strong impetus for the involvement in a struggle for housing. Additionally in the material realisation of their houses the women use the makeup and style of a dominant middle-class discourse (namely the freestanding house, with a small garden and a (white) fence). This is in line with Kellett’s (1995) findings in Columbia. Behind these more formal

elements a deeper symbolic and political process is hidden. Through the realisation of the house people can show the outside world who they are, within the context of the studied neighbourhoods it has become clear that a formal house is so much more than a shack or a wendy. The proper house transforms their inhabitants to full-fledged members of society, as the respondents clearly stated during the interviews. It makes them proud, but it also makes them responsible. From this two consequences arise: a first one comes with the “new identity” or “new status”, a new or different attitude and behaviour follows. This was illustrated in the Freedom Park neighbourhood where more people than before were actively trying to find a job or participated in community activities such as a gardening project. The second consequence reinforces the first one, as the responsibility also means one has to make sure the house stays well maintained. The economical reality comes to the fore and one has to have financial means to keep up with the bills and costs that arise from home-ownership. We can conclude that the interplay between political/symbolical meaning of the house and the economic reality seriously diminishes the people’s possibilities for contesting governmental discourses.

To Conclude

Does all this mean that (self)normalisation through the object of the home removes every means of questioning dominant societal or governmental discourses? A yes or no answer is not possible, instead I want to refocus our attention to another factor, which is the “*ontological security*”, briefly noticed in the beginning of this paper and defined by Giddens (1984, p. 375) as a “[c]onfidence or trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity”. In the complex and fast reality of today people use their homes to realise this ontological security and to realise a sense of belonging (Giddens, 1994 and Clapham, 2005). People are looking for stability and normality. As such, we should not only contemplate over the question if there are any means of resistance left but also over the possibility that maybe there is no will to resist dominant societal values and norms.

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