

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

## THE MISNOMER OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION IN SOUTH AFRICA AND IMPLICATIONS ON TOWNSHIPS' DEVELOPMENT

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### —Abstract—

*Globally, the increasing rates of people's movement from rural to urban areas is regarded as one of the major challenges inhibiting efficient and sustainable urban development. However, the majority of people who move from rural areas to towns and/or cities in South Africa in search of a better quality of life, culminate in nearby townships and/or informal settlements because of the unaffordability of the urban lifestyle. Urban areas mostly offer jobs to the lucky migrants but in most cases fail to provide decent and affordable accommodation to the majority of the low and middle class population who in turn settle in nearby townships. Thus, the phenomenon named "rural-urban migration" is actually "rural-township migration" given the practical spatial patterns of people in South Africa. People migrate from rural to urban areas in search of a better life and some manage to secure jobs in towns and cities with the majority being able to afford accommodation within nearby townships. Practically, the majority of the urban labour who mostly originate from rural areas resides in township and not in towns and cities, as theoretically assumed. Therefore, this paper theoretically argues that the misnomer of the phenomenon rural-urban migration has adverse implications on the development of South Africa's townships which accommodate the majority of rural migrants. Most South African townships cannot cater for the high population rates with the limited services and inadequate infrastructure available in these areas. While development focus is on urban areas which are mostly active and crowded during the day, the majority of urban labourers find residence in nearby undeveloped and crowded townships. The paper concludes that the misnomer of rural-urban migration has adverse implications on the development of South Africa's townships because development investments are channelled to urban areas instead of townships.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the increasing rates of people's movement from rural to urban areas is regarded as one of the major challenges hampering efficient and sustainable urban development (Busayo, Kalumba & Orimoloye, 2019; Xie and Chen, 2018; Yang, Liu, Li and Du, 2018; Shen, 2017; Harrison and Todes, 2015; Jürgens, Donaldson, Rule and Bähr, 2013). Rural-urban migration is key in the current social and economic changes, both in rural and urban areas with an expected shift mainly in economic imbalances as well as rural-urban wealth gaps (Oranje, van Huyssteen and Maritz, 2020; Yang et al., 2018; Shen, 2017). This phenomenon influences the social, economic and environmental patterns and it is the most determining factor of land use changes in rural and urban areas. More specifically, access to affordable housing is a dominating factor that influences the settlement choices of rural-urban migrants (Yang et al., 2018; Oranje et al., 2020; Xie and Chen, 2018; Shen, 2017). When choosing their residences, the housing attributes mostly considered by migrants include, among others, the purchase and/or rental prices; availability, access and affordability of public infrastructure and amenities; size of the property; tenure; as well as location (Oranje et al., 2020; Xie and Chen, 2018; Tao, Hui, Wong, and Chen, 2015). Additionally, demographic and socioeconomic factors which include the level of education, type of occupation and income level, also strongly relate to the migrants' urban settlement and housing choices (Yang et al., 2018; Xie and Chen, 2018; Shen, 2017; Tang and Feng, 2015). Social networks are also a deciding factor in determining the residential preferences of rural-urban migrants (Xie and Chen, 2018; Shen, 2017; Chen and Liu, 2016). The ability of migrants to build good and sustainable social relations successfully with residents in the chosen area is important. Thus, a combination of these factors results in the majority of South Africa's rural-urban migrants finding suitable residence and housing in nearby townships rather than in town and city centres.

The settlement experiences of migrants in towns and cities across developed and developing countries are different. In developed countries such as China, the citizens are divided into two groups, namely; urban and rural residents, with the latter group requiring the government's permission to move into any of the urban areas in the country (Yang et al., 2018; Xie and Chen, 2018). As part of the mechanism to control population growth in urban areas chiefly propounded by rural-urban migration, the system further serves as a strategy to maintain social,

economic, environmental and political stability in towns and cities regardless of the urban growth (Yang et al., 2018; Xie and Chen, 2018). Like developed countries, most developing countries' towns and cities are experiencing the process of urbanisation mainly as a result of rural-urban migration (Oranje et al., 2020; Turok, 2014). In South Africa, the rapid urban expansion gave rise to diverse landscapes, especially in urban peripheries such as townships and informal settlements which are characterised by a mixture of both urban and rural activities. While they are still searching for jobs in towns and cities, the majority of the rural-urban migrants find residence in the urban peripheries and later settle in the same areas even after they are employed in urban centres (Todes and Turok, 2018; Turok, 2014).

Although some of the migrants may find rented accommodation in town and city centres near their places of work, they later tend to relocate to the urban peripheries as their final settlement areas (Oranje et al., 2020; Todes and Turok, 2018; Shen, 2017; Harrison and Todes, 2015). The majority of rural migrants live in informal settlements characterised by shacks and lack of infrastructure and services with a limited number of them having capacity to purchase housing property from the urban market (Busayo et al., 2019; Oranje et al., 2020; Todes and Turok, 2018; Turok, 2014). Although there are various initiatives geared towards providing affordable housing in urban areas, the migrants have limited access to such. Therefore, South Africa's rural migrants are subjected to informal social networks to secure housing which often lands them in marginalised and segregated informal settlements and townships. For most of the migrants, the housing market is a dominant factor in determining their places of residence in and around towns and cities. Due to their lower income levels, the majority of the migrants end up residing in nearby townships usually in poor living conditions (Oranje et al., 2020; Todes and Turok, 2018; Shen, 2017; Jürgens et al., 2013). The townships which are segregated from the mainstream of the urban system and society, become homes for the majority of the migrants.

Experiences of developed countries with regard to the settlement preferences of rural-urban migrants are similar to what South Africa is faced with. Most migrants who are employed in towns and cities find residence in the nearby human settlements, which are mostly townships and in some cases, informal settlements instead of residing within the urban centres. Thus, the phenomenon named "rural-urban migration" is actually "rural-township migration" given the practical spatial patterns of people in South Africa. It is against this background that this paper theoretically argues that the misnomer of the phenomenon rural-urban migration has adverse implications on the development of South Africa's townships which

accommodate the majority of rural migrants. The paper consists of six sections, inclusive of the introduction and the conclusion. The second section discusses the nature of rural-urban migration and its implications on the development of urban areas in order to get an informed understanding of what the phenomenon entails. The third section reflects on development in South Africa's townships in light of the phenomenon termed rural-urban migration while the fourth section discusses the misnomer of rural-urban migration in South Africa by reflecting on practical movements of migrants and the attendant implications on development in townships. The paper then concludes that the misnomer of rural-urban migration has adverse implications on development in South Africa's townships because development investments are channelled to urban areas instead of townships.

## **2. URBAN AREA, RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Rural-urban migration is an unavoidable phenomenon in the course of urban growth, socioeconomic and environmental development. The phenomenon is characterised by challenges often associated with labour mobility and which are common in developing countries (Oranje et al., 2020; Todes and Turok, 2018; Harrison and Todes, 2015; Turok, 2014; Jürgens et al., 2013). The challenges are a result of institutional constraints, social norms and standards, cultural and language diversity and economic status, among other factors (Wang and Fu, 2019; Shen, 2017). Although the concept of rural-urban migration suggests that migrants move to urban areas, the reality, however, is that they are more likely to find residence in the urban periphery's informal settlements and nearby settlements instead of settling in urban centres. As a result, the migrants contribute to the rapid population growth of areas which are around towns and cities (Oranje et al., 2020; Todes and Turok, 2018; Turok, 2014). In these preferred settlements, they are further spatially clustered based on their places of origin as well as culture thereby creating migrant territories (Huysamen, Barnett & Fraser, 2020; Busayo et al., 2019). Irrespective of the fact that urban centres remain somewhat prosperous and ideal places to live, work and school in, the majority of migrants still prefer to settle in surrounding areas which are, contrastively characterised by a lack of or limited public services and infrastructure (Wang and Fu, 2019; Shen, 2017; Harrison and Todes, 2015; Jürgens et al., 2013). The urban peripheries and nearby settlements provide low housing prices and usually offer bulks of low-cost private rental houses, apartments and rooms in both formal and informal developments (Oranje et al., 2020).

Therefore, the developments cater for the budget of the majority of these rural-urban migrants. Although a few of these migrants may be able to purchase

properties in the urban centres, their investments are often nevertheless leased through the area's rental market (Wang and Fu, 2019; Shen, 2017). The concentration of migrants on urban peripheral locations, is a reflection of the disadvantages they face in the urban housing market because of their socioeconomic status. Rural-urban migrants are usually at the "bottom of the urban socioeconomic and labour market strata and given that the price of commodity housing is high, it is almost impossible for them to buy their own homes, let alone pay for high-price estates in central locations" (Shen, 2017: 429). The market leaves the migrants with limited housing options associated with low-cost private rental housing in urban peripheries. Additionally, the migrants' relocation is also motivated by social capital they have with other migrants from their places of origin. According to Shen (2017: 430), "more often than not, when migrants first come to the city, they receive social support in finding jobs or accommodation from earlier migrants from the same place of origin. They usually work in the same enterprises and live in the same neighbourhoods as their relatives or friends who arrived earlier. As a result, suburban migrant enclaves such as urban villages are usually their initial residential location". Although migrant neighbourhoods are mostly considered to be overcrowded, disorderly and dangerous places, available and accessible low cost housing next to their workplace is seemingly, the main reason for migrants to choose to stay in townships and informal settlements. Rural-urban migration is also the most pervasive feature of South Africa's national spatial development landscape (Oranje et al., 2020; Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2018). Hence, the next section discusses the country's township development in relation to rural-urban migration.

### **3. SOUTH AFRICA'S TOWNSHIPS, RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

South Africa's townships are mostly located distances away from towns and cities such as Johannesburg, Durban, Pretoria, Cape Town, Polokwane and East London, among others. As part of racial segregation, these settlements were imposed during apartheid where separate residential areas called 'townships' were established for black ethnic groups, coloureds and Indians, specifically at urban peripheries and kilometers away from towns and cities (Busayo et al., 2019; Todes and Turok, 2018; Harrison and Todes, 2015; Turok, 2014; Jürgens et al., 2013). These spatial arrangements resulted in fragmented settlement patterns characterised by long distance travels between where the middle class and the poor live and work (Todes and Turok, 2018; Turok, 2014). South Africa's apartheid townships were established through large low cost housing projects to

be residential areas with limited basic services, low-order economic activities with mostly retail and lack of social facilities in order to house the urban laborers (Busayo et al., 2019; Todes and Turok, 2018; Jürgens et al., 2013). Notwithstanding the State's development initiatives and strategies meant to promote township shopping centres from the 1980s, the areas' economies remained deficient, forcing residents to seek employment in urban areas (Todes and Turok, 2018; Turok, 2014). The township workers were/are then forced to commute long distances between their homes and places of work at very high costs (NPC, 2012). To date, the past spatial planning has resulted in fragmented and mushrooming of townships and informal settlements on the urban edges (Todes and Turok, 2018; Harrison and Todes, 2015; South African Cities Network (SACN), 2011). The apartheid under-investment of resources towards services and infrastructure in townships led to the current challenges experienced in some of these areas, such as limited water and sanitation services and deteriorating public infrastructure, among others.

Townships are complex, multifaceted, diverse and ever-evolving urban-rural spaces that cannot be sufficiently explained by a single definition; however, they are commonly known for their poor living conditions as well as urban infrastructure discrepancies (Huysamen et al., 2020). According to Frenzel (2016:10), townships are "areas of relative urban poverty" whereas for some, they can also be places of hope. Therefore, Nuissl and Heinrichs (2013) conceptualised townships as either 'slums of despair' or 'slums of hope'. The slums of despair are "places of stagnation characterized by economic and social exclusion, and as inherently devoid of opportunities for substantial economic development and social mobility for residents" (Davis, 2006 in Huysamen et al., 2020). On the contrary, slums of hope are capable of producing ideal 'neoliberal subjects' who are 'adaptive, self-sustaining, and able to help themselves out of poverty' by working hard, engaging in entrepreneurship, making good decisions and choices, and effectively using the resources that are available and accessible to them (Huysamen et al., 2020; Reed, 2012). Sometimes, the "level of poverty that these people live in is unbelievable. But everyone has hope and aspirations of getting a house and work" (Huysamen et al., 2020:91). Thus, instead of finding residence in urban centres, the majority of the rural-urban migrants prefer nearby townships as slums of hope.

Although South Africa has a rights-based Constitution as well as large-scale housing subsidy scheme in response to its citizens' basic housing and services' needs, there are still basic housing and services related challenges in townships and informal settlements (Huysamen et al., 2020; Busayo et al., 2019; Jürgens et

al., 2013). Access to land as well as basic housing and municipal services still remains a major challenge in urban and rural areas and townships of South Africa (Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2014). Evident in different ways, the apartheid dualism system in relation to land tenure and use as well as urbanisation still accommodates white South Africans while it continues to restrict, suppress and control black South Africans (Huysamen et al., 2020; Oranje et al., 2020; Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2018). Furthermore, “the colonial and Apartheid belief that black urbanites were not permanently ‘in town’ and would go (back) to reserve-like rural areas, seems to still prevail in the form of a continued focus on the provision of new housing in and around former ‘temporary’ black ‘townships’, and the lack of decisive de novo re-planning and redevelopment of historically fragmented and separated settlements as one” (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2018:8).

Closely related with rural-urban migration is a process known as ‘household splitting’, where family members living in the same households separate and relocate, often given the availability of state-subsidised housing mostly in and around townships (SACN, 2016; The Presidency, 2014). The phenomenon has also led to the ever-increasing long waiting lists for low-cost state-subsidised housing, massive municipal service backlogs, illegal connections to municipal services, especially water and electricity as well as insecure livelihoods and tenure through the mushrooming of townships and/or informal settlements (Oranje et al., 2020; SACN, 2016; Jürgens et al., 2013) That is, land is regarded as a commodity rather than an asset for well-being where land, tenure and municipal services are obtained informally and sometimes illegally as part of the social realities in townships and/or informal settlements (Huysamen et al., 2020; Oranje et al., 2020). Simultaneously, these informal and illegal conditions gave rise to the increasing large numbers of households, mostly in the form of informal settlements and various backyard rental accommodation where most rooms are without formal access to water, electricity and sanitation (SACN, 2016). Lack of access to services in these areas leads to illegal water and electricity connections which adversely affect service use, municipal financial viability and delivery capabilities (Huysamen et al., 2020; Oranje et al., 2020; Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), 2015). Regardless of the officials’ awareness of this illegal practice, very little or nothing is done to curb such illicit practices. Concurrently, backyard accommodation rentals are acknowledged as an important component of the urban network, a source of incomes, and a vital enabler of urban livelihoods (Oranje et al., 2020; SACN, 2016; DWS, 2015).

#### **4. MISNOMER OF SOUTH AFRICA'S RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION: RURAL-TOWNSHIP MIGRATION IN PRACTICE**

After the removal of apartheid controls, increased rates of rural-urban migration, urbanisation and changes in the economic structures were not surprising. Due to racial desegregation, South Africa's towns and cities also attract migrants from other countries, in search of better opportunities (Todes and Turok, 2018; Jürgens et al., 2013). However, the provision of formal, decent and affordable housing in towns and cities cannot cater for the current population growth, hence the establishment of informal settlements in the urban peripheries and next to the townships which are characterised by limited basic services, lack of housing and jobs (Todes and Turok, 2018; Harrison and Todes, 2015; Jürgens et al., 2013). Although these settlements are "slums of hope", the same settlements sometimes appear to be 'sources of growing discontent and social unrest' in townships and informal settlements (Todes and Turok, 2018; Harrison and Todes, 2015). With an attempt to cater for the growing population in townships and informal settlements, low cost State-subsidised housing has been built in some of these areas and their surroundings. Although basic public services have been improved in response to the 'need for redress and redistribution in service delivery', the increasing population puts pressure on these services. The integration of the middle class with the poor has been one of the key development priorities in many townships such as Soweto, Atteridgeville, Soshanguve, Seshego, Khayelitsha and Umlazi, among others (Todes and Turok, 2018). Notably, there is also increase in economic activities within these townships through the development of shopping centres, the building of more spaza shops and the increase in informal trade (Todes and Turok, 2018; Harrison and Todes, 2015). For 'slums of hope', these economic activities play a crucial role in the lives of the township residents.

Although the concept of rural-urban migration suggests that migrants move to urban areas, they are instead, more likely to find residence in the urban periphery's informal settlements and nearby settlements other than the urban centres. However, the majority of people who move from rural to towns and/or cities in South Africa in search of a better quality of life, culminate in nearby townships because of the unaffordability of the urban lifestyle. Urban areas mostly offer jobs to the lucky migrants but in most cases, fails to provide decent and affordable accommodation to the majority of the low and middle class population, who in turn settle in nearby townships. People migrate from rural to urban areas in search of a better life and some manage to secure jobs in towns and cities with the majority being able to afford accommodation within nearby townships. Additionally, the sense of community, solidarity, friendship,

togetherness and belonging in these townships attracts the rural-urban migrants (Huysamen et al., 2020; Harrison and Todes, 2015). Various black cultural identity preservations within the townships and/or informal settlements also attract most rural-migrants into these areas.

Although township residents live in conditions of hostile poverty and operate within “a structural system of perpetual disempowerment as part of the continuing effects of South Africa’s long history of colonisation and apartheid”, the majority of the migrants still relocate to townships and/or surrounding informal settlements (Huysamen et al., 2020; Jürgens et al., 2013). As a matter of choice rather than limitation, some residents who succeed educationally and economically, choose to remain in the townships as a result of the comfort, keeping their traditions and cultures alive as well as sustaining the sense of community in the areas. Migrants’ choices of residence in townships conceal the reality that 26 years into democracy, many black South Africans are still living in spaces that were engineered to exploit, control and oppress them. These areas are further associated with poverty, overcrowding, lack of basic services and high incidences of disease, among other challenges. In the presence of these challenges, townships are still considered as “productive spaces which are rich in non-material assets, inhabited by happy children and hard-working adults with hope for the future” (Huysamen et al., 2020: 92). These places give migrants ‘hope for the future’, which suggests that townships are generally places of hope for improved and progressive life for them. Evidently, townships such as Alexandra, Tembisa, Diepsloot, Soshanguve, Umlazi, Khayelitsha, Seshego and Siyabuswa, among others, still house the majority of the black population who migrated from rural areas with the hope of finding jobs in nearby urban areas such as Sandton, Johannesburg and Pretoria. Practically, the majority of the urban labour who mostly originate from rural areas resides in townships and not in towns and cities, as theoretically assumed. That is, the phenomenon named “rural-urban migration” is actually “rural-township migration” given the spatial patterns movement of people in South Africa. The majority of South African townships cannot cater for the high population rates with the limited services and inadequate infrastructure available in these areas. While development focus is on the urban areas which are mostly active and crowded during the day, the majority of the labourers find residence in nearby undeveloped and crowded townships.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The paper foregrounded the characteristics of townships in view of the South African context. Generally, townships are residential areas which are situated at

travelling distances from their nearby towns or cities. They are further characterised by low-order economic activities, lack and/or limited services delivery and deteriorating infrastructure. Regardless of the socio-economic circumstances in these areas, a majority of rural-urban migrants still finds it ideal to find residence in these areas. The migrants are apparently attracted by the housing market and sense of community, among others, in these areas. Instead of residing in towns and cities which offered them employment, a majority of migrants prefer to reside in nearby townships and in some cases, in informal settlements. It is against these theoretical findings that the paper concludes that the misnomer of rural-urban migration has adverse implications on development in South Africa's townships because development investments are channeled to urban areas instead of townships.

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