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LECTIO PRÆCURSORIA

The Economies of Care and Politics of Return: Sustaining Life Among Injivas and Their Families in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

4 February, 2023, University of Helsinki

ABSTRACT

A lectio præcursoria is a short presentation read out loud by a doctoral candidate at the start of a public thesis examination in Finland. It introduces the key points or central argument of the thesis in a way that should make the ensuing discussion between the examinee and the examiner apprehensible to the audience, many of whom may be unfamiliar with the candidate's research or even anthropological research in general.

Madam Custos, Madam Opponent, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am happy to welcome you all to this defense.

In August 2018, when I started my eight-month-long fieldwork period in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe had just held historical elections, the first since Independence in 1980 in which Robert Mugabe was not a candidate. Ten months earlier, after 37 years in power, Mugabe had been forced to step down by the army and his own party. For multiple reasons, the decades since independence have been marked by political and economic conflicts and state violence, a lack of formal employment opportunities and the HIV/AIDS pandemic that overstretched kin networks to care for the needy. This caused intense out-migration and reliance on remittances. According to some estimates a quarter of Zimbabwe's population has left the country, mostly for South Africa (UNDP 2010).

Two weeks after my fieldwork started, the ruling party and Emmerson Mnangagwa, who had been in power since Mugabe's sacking, were declared to have won the elections. During my fieldwork, this 'New Dispensation' continued to use violent and lethal measures against those who did not agree with the election results, or those who protested against the tripled fuel price. Kilometer-long fuel queues, a lack of medicine and skilled workers, fluctuating currency rates, and increasing inflation occurred. Newspapers warned Zimbabwe of 'being at the crossroads of horror' (Daily News 2019), stating that 'the hope for the economy [was in] the hand[s] of the Zimbabwean diaspora' (Sunday News 2019). Yet getting passports and other ID documents to cross borders safely constituted a key challenge, although it did not stop people imagining or practicing mobile ways of life.

This is the political and economic space during which the majority of my data was collected. Together with many others, I call

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it a crisis, or rather a situation of multiple, overlapping crises (see eg. Chiumbu and Musemwa 2012, Hammar 2014, Hammar et al 2010, Jaji 2021, Raftopoulos 2009). Given these conditions, Southern African migration scholars Jonathan Crush and Daniel Tevera (2010: 2) have asked 'who, why, and indeed how, anyone could stay in Zimbabwe?'. While migrant realities in South Africa are relatively well documented, accounts of return migration remain invisible in policy and scholarly accounts.

This was the starting point for my research. It motivated me to look at the outcome of the endemic crisis and displacement *inside* Zimbabwe, through the lens of those who return. Consequently, this dissertation that I defend today is about those who return from South Africa to Zimbabwe at various stages of their life-cycle – from the beginning to the end. It is an account of how people live in, rather than through crises (cf. Vigh 2008), and how they repair and continue life-sustaining relations and practices in both intimate and bureaucratic fields. These are – as the study demonstrates – often empirically inseparable in daily life. Further questions that have guided my research include, for instance: How are the ideals and experiences of belonging, as both citizenship and kinship, reshaped, and co-constituted in such conditions? What kind of institutions, subjectivities, categories, and conceptualizations of care have grown out them, and what kind of historical tales do they have? How is the image of a caring state constructed and maintained even though the state is also experienced through fear and suffering?

To address these questions, the study draws on nine months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in two periods: between August and September 2016 and from August 2018 until March 2019. Most data were collected in Bulawayo, but also in Johannesburg and border zones. The majority of my interlocutors were low-income Zimbabweans who had migrated to South Africa, people locally referred to with the historically and morally loaded term *injiva.* While some of them continued to live in South Africa, most had returned to Bulawayo – usually due to their difficulties in finding or maintaining livelihoods in South Africa. Besides *injivas* themselves, the ethnography also encompasses their families and the formal and informal bureaucrats that they encounter, representing the domains of migration management, cross-border mobility, child and community care, education, and family law. In addition, the study utilizes media and archival resources, as well as state documents and reports.

In principle, I think that one task of an ethnographer is to understand how people themselves experience and conceptualize life. Therefore, I use the term *injiva* instead of other alternatives, such as 'border jumper' or 'illegal migrant'. Although such state-centric labels *are* also locally recognized and reproduced, the term *injiva* captures aspects of reality that do not fit into such framings. Rooted in the colonial labour migration of men, today the *injiva* term also refers to the women and children who move to South Africa – and those who return. It continues to carry expectations of success and remittances, the ability to take suffering and risks, and to improvise. Yet, in lived reality, *injivas* often face great pressure and challenges if they are to fulfill this ideal.

Another local key term that runs throughout the thesis is *kiya-kiya* and its synonym *ukuhlanganisa.* My interlocutors defined them as 'mixing things in order to survive', 'running around and closing up economic gaps', 'making oneself useful', or just 'making a plan for today'. They refer to the urgent need to organize life so that needs are met today and is also a key attribute of

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a successful *injiva*. Jeremy Jones (2010) has identified *kukiya-kiya* as the core to economic actions in 21st-century Zimbabwe. Building on his work, I argue that *kiya-kiya* does not only characterize people's efforts to generate *money* in the present. In situations where planning short and long-term futures is difficult, people make *zigzag* arrangements with other forms of making do that go beyond the labor market and economic production.

The thesis develops an analytic of 'economies of care', which forms the thread of this research. It helps to take advantage of the intensity of fieldwork and to problematize these complex 'mixing and matching' processes, and the multiplicity of relations, institutions, interactions, and rationalities through which people try to 'to hold things together in a livable way', to borrow from Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2011: 10). Certainly, the chapters of this dissertation illustrate how, in order to 'maintain, continue and repair life-worlds', as Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher (1990: 40) have defined caring, people claim access to various resources. These touch on concerns over practical childcare arrangements, access to remittances, spiritual and physical protection during journeys and border-crossings, agents and practices that can secure the dignified repatriation of infants or dead and dying bodies and safe journeys to the afterlife, and those facilitating access to global humanitarian care regimes and to custodial and maintenance rights. Entangled in these, a range of 'economies of mediation and fabrication', to use Madeleine Reeves's (2019: 26) terms, were critical.

At the center of economies of care is the endurance, creativity, and determination embedded in people's efforts to make a livable life. Indeed, crises, as Amanda Hammar (2014) has argued, do not only cause disruption and displacement. Paradoxically, they also generate new forms of life and living that coexist with various forms of everyday struggles. At the same time, lives are not just randomly organized in terms of daily labour to establish a sense of continuity and belonging but draw on and reconfigure historically constructed ideas and institutions of care. In short, economies of care and making-do operate at the intersection of logics, moral ideas, and affects, across time and space, and over generations.

The thesis begins with explanations of the key concepts of 'the state' and 'kinship' as central and intertwined domains in economies of care. Kinship and kin members, both dead and alive, were typically the first resort for those who needed care, which forced me to face my rather outdated understanding of what kinship studies in contemporary anthropology entail. Instead of looking at what kinship is – or is not – the material pressed me to think about how kinship is used to make claims on resources: how it is made and unmade; and how the lines of exclusion and inclusion have been revised when cultural and religious ideals are challenged by the practical pitfalls of daily life: for instance, in situations where one does not know where one's children will live next.

The dissertation also demonstrates how economies of care encompass not only the terrain of kinship, but also political and bureaucratic practices shaped by the crises, and various global child welfare institutions, categorizations, and ideologies: for instance, in relation to a 'child's best interest', and 'vulnerability'. Although the term 'state' was often used to refer to the ruling party, experienced through violence and mistrust, the study has shared the anthropological understanding that the state-in-practice works at different levels, in different subject areas, with different portfolios and operated by a variety of state agents (eg. Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014, Das and Poole 2004, Ferguson

and Gupta 2002, Hagmann and Péclard 2010, Sharma and Gupta 2006). Acknowledging that the everyday is an arena where learn something about the state, I accompanied my interlocutors through various governmental encounters to make sense of how the state was reproduced, and how the state agents themselves perceived their work, negotiated often conflicting demands made on them, and interacted with their 'clients' or 'cases'.

It is argued that states, in general, are doing less in terms of the care and welfare of their citizens and that 'the resources they are able to extract and distribute are becoming smaller' (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 22). It is questionable, however, whether Zimbabwe or other formerly colonized states, have ever been able—or willing—to address the needs of most of the population. Nevertheless, the thesis demonstrates that although the Zimbabwean state has very little resources to distribute as material care, the power that the state agents embody seems to be based on their authority to mobilize and distribute resources that the state does not supply itself, including family resources in the form of maintenance and custodial orders, right to mobility, or international aid. Indeed, despite neoliberal transformations, global aid is also dependent on the state structures and state agents, rather than replacing them as such – since, unlike international aid, the state does not work according to project cycles.

Furthermore, as the final chapters of the book indicate, state agents do not always only work only through their formal mandates and state frameworks. Their actual work— and legitimacy—also draws on their affective registers through their cultural understandings of kinships and care, meaning they might be able to attend to local care needs that do not fit into state or NGO frameworks. As an outcome,

the state can also come to be experienced as potentially caring.

The dissertation pays considerable attention to various forms of registration that emerged as common in state encounters. Historically, documents were tools to monitor and govern the mobility of the Black population. In its refashioned form, documentation is a mundane state act that has persisted even through conditions of crises—one which low-income, urban Bulawayoans must navigate, particularly those who were, or claimed to be, vulnerable, and on behalf of those who are born or die. Let me focus on birth registration, to present one empirical example of the functioning of economies of care, shedding light on the mutual interaction of state- and kin-making, transnational frames, and the creativity embedded in them.

After decades of 'orphan' policy issues, birth registration is becoming an increasingly central topic in global development and among policy makers (Wood 2019). For instance, one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal is to provide legal identity for all by 2030. Indeed, birth registration has become an indicator to measure the progress of countries in areas such as children's rights or good governance. In practice, a birth certificate is a primary form of access to political identity, a precondition for other citizenship rights, a key to access school examinations, justice, voting, a bank account, or further ID and travel documents. Without a birth certificate one does not legally exist.

However, as in many former colonies, birth registration rates in Zimbabwe remain low—between 30 and 40 percent according to different sources. Indeed, the birth registration of children who were sent back from South Africa or 'left behind' in Zimbabwe was a

common concern among my interlocutors. Reasons for undocumentedness were multiple, but usually linked to cross-border migration and the Zimbabwean state's incapacity to provide citizen certificates, creating conditions of illegality, but also new ways to navigate such conditions. For instance, many women came back to Zimbabwe to give birth, returning to South Africa before registering the infant, while others borrowed someone else's authentic papers to assure a safe birth in South Africa. Under these conditions, while many children had no birth certificates at all, some had become formally registered in families and lineages where they did not customarily 'belong'. This had great impact on how both state and kin were experienced. For example, while it could cause misfortune for papered and 'real' families when children—and adults—who had been kinned, to use Signe Howell's (2003) term, had the wrong surname, it could also provide protective status, secure child grants or pensions—or bring surprises at the time of inheritance.

'Getting the birth registration straight' according to the official procedures was often costly, dangerous, or practically impossible. However, there were commonly known ways to navigate the registration procedures. One was to draft a believable birth narrative. This mostly required assistance from someone, usually an ordinary civil servant, who had knowledge of the official protocols, as well as eyewitnesses, affidavits, and new – invented – dates and places of birth. A central concern was to rehearse the narrative, to piece the details together into a coherent, believable, solid testimony. The people assessing such narratives were not necessarily interested in people's authentic, 'truthful' identities and the material facts of births or deaths. Instead, what mattered most was that the presentation of life was 'made believable'. This example demonstrates how the mundane

state act of birth registration is simultaneously an important kin act, creating membership in both state and kin groups, but also could involve a great deal improvisation and brokerage.

To finish, I hope that my research has honored the experiences of my interlocutors, reflecting their realities in a manner that uncovers their complex life-worlds, tracing the historical tales of their life-sustaining practices and relations, and providing tools that can be used in other contexts of dislocation and crises. I further hope that the work problematizes preconceptions and taken-for-granted definitions associated with African migrants and returnees, 'the vulnerable', and the various agents and institutions that they rely on to cope in the frontline of multilayered precarity.

Madam Opponent, I now call upon you to present your critical comments on my dissertation.

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