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Death and the sociocultural dimensions of forced relocations: experiences from the Tugwi-Mukosi displacement in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe

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This article is an ethnographic inquiry into the cultural dimensions of forced relocations. It is based on the experiences of four resident anthropologists on the forced displacements at Tugwi-Mukosi in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe. Using the concept of death, we question the idea of belonging and what is regarded as an “honourable” way of exiting this world. These are interwoven in the cultural fabric of most Zimbabwean communities and any phenomenon that severs this tie to home is a cause of discomfort and pain amongst local people. Forced displacements have altered issues of honour associated with death rituals. We use death rituals as a window to understand the sociocultural effects of displacement. Novel ways of dealing with death are witnessed as people struggle with lack of a permanent “home.” The sacredness of cultural dimensions of death has been reconfigured in ways that have left the displaced struggling to find closure in dealing with the dead. Death rituals give us an opportunity to understand the multifaceted effects of displacement. Through death we experience the pain of displacement, understand the chords that bind the displaced communities together and witness the enduring social bonds that structure life beyond the disruptions of displacement.

Este artigo é uma investigação etnográfica sobre as dimensões culturais das realoções forçadas. Este se baseia nas experiências de quatro antropólogos membros na comunidade que sofreu as remoções forçadas em Tugwi Mukosi na província de Masvingo, no Zimbabwe. Usando o conceito de morte, questionamos a ideia de pertencer e o que é considerado uma forma “honrosa” de sair deste mundo. Estas duas noções estão entrelaçadas no tecido cultural da maioria das comunidades do Zimbabwe e qualquer fenómeno que rompa esse vínculo com o lar é uma causa de desconforto e dor entre a população local. As realoções forçadas alteraram as questões de honra associadas aos rituais de morte. Usamos os rituais de morte como uma janela para compreender os efeitos socioculturais do deslocamento. Novas formas de lidar com a morte são testemunhadas à medida que as pessoas lutam contra a falta de um “lar” permanente. A sacralidade das dimensões culturais da morte foi reconfigurada a tal ponto que deixou os deslocados com dificuldades para encontrar o sentido de conclusão ao lidar com os mortos. Os rituais de morte nos dão a oportunidade de compreender os efeitos multifacetados das realoções. Por meio da morte, experimentamos a dor do deslocamento, compreendemos os acordos que unem as comunidades deslocadas e testemunhamos os laços sociais duradouros que estruturam a vida além das rupturas das realoções.

Keywords: belonging; death rituals; forced displacements; honour and dishonour; Tugwi-Mukosi Dam

Introduction and background

Human communities have been known to prefer order and stability as well as a sense of direction. But often life presents calamities that are disruptive to this desire for a sense of order. One such disruptive element is death, and various scholars have noted that death rituals in different societies are a mechanism by which the society tries to come to terms with the disruptive implications of death whilst simultaneously restoring a certain order through which people can make sense of

the world (Bonsu and DeBerry-Spence 2008; Hoy 2013; Roberson, Smith and Davidson 2018). Another such disruptive element is forced displacement, such as that experienced by the people of Tugwi and Mukosi in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe, when a dam under construction suddenly flooded before the people affected had been properly relocated. The emergency that developed culminated in the state uprooting people from their areas of origin in a haphazard manner. Though a man-made crisis, the displacement has forever altered the course of the lives of the displaced (Mucherera and Spiegel 2021). It is against this backdrop that we write as people affected, directly and indirectly, probing some crucial issues on how the disruptive nature of displacement has had major implications on the social and cultural values of the displaced. Using the concept of death, we explore how death is an instrument that allows us to understand the effects of displacement both on the displaced and on the reconstruction of identities and relationships. Though displacement often results in the dispersion of close kin, death is instrumental in recreating and keeping alive these ties. We begin by giving a brief background of the Tugwi-Mukosi displacement, as context for our focus on the present experiences of life after displacement.

The Tugwi-Mukosi displacement in perspective

The Tugwi-Mukosi Dam is built on the famous Tugwi and Mukosi rivers in south-eastern Zimbabwe (Figure 1). People in Chivi and Masvingo districts living in the vicinity of the dam were moved from their homes due to the construction of the dam. The most notable and unexpected displacement occurred during the 2013/2014 rainy season when the area received above normal rainfall, leading to the flooding of people’s homes. Initially the displaced were housed at Chingwizi Transit Camp, approximately 140 km from the dam and built in 2014, in the aftermath of the flooding of the dam (Mukwashi 2019). The villagers were evacuated without support structures, food, shelter or other necessities, albeit under serious resistance from the villagers (UNDP 2015). More than 3 000 families were displaced by the rain-initiated floods, with a total of close to 50 000 villagers removed from their homes to make way for the dam (Mucherera and Spiegel 2021).

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the Tugwi-Mukosi displacement is that it evades the conventional categorisation of displacement, owing to several factors. The people in the

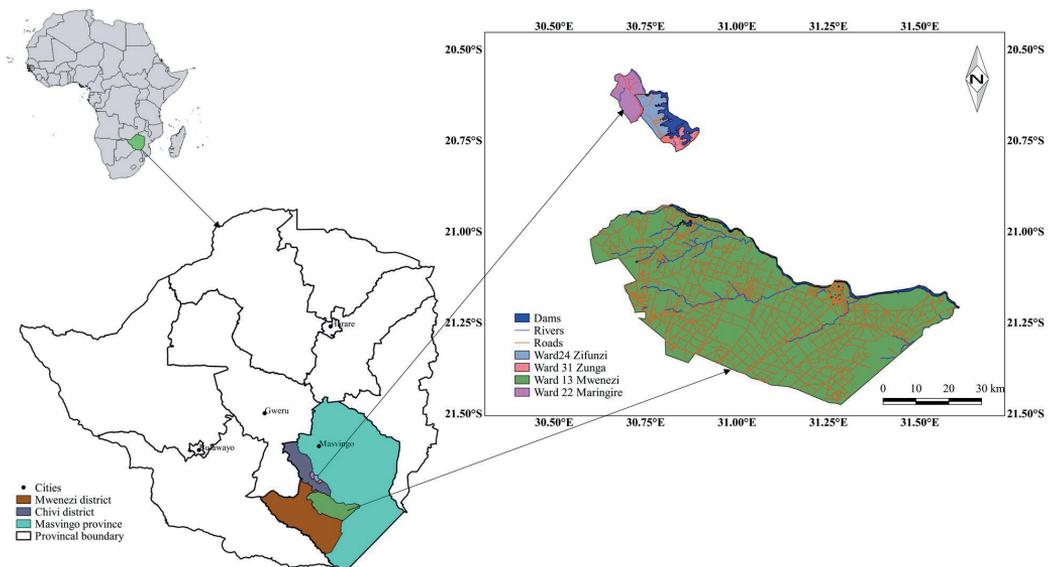


Figure 1: Map of area affected by Tugwi-Mukosi Dam. Bottom left: Zimbabwe with Masvingo province. Insert top right: Tugwi-Mukosi Dam with locations of origin in Chivi district. Insert bottom right: Ward 13 in Mwenezi district, location of displacement. © Hardlife Stephen Basure

communities surrounding the dam were moved in a haphazard manner, with planning and dam construction characterised by knee-jerk reactions. Whereas construction blueprints can be traced back as far as 1955 in colonial Rhodesia (Mukwashi 2019), construction only commenced in 1998 after the postcolonial government revived the project as a major development tool for hydroelectric generation, irrigated agriculture and tourism and to stimulate the growth of an agriculture-based town in the area. In this sense the displacement of people from the Tugwi-Mukosi area can be classified as development-induced resettlement.

However, the lack of proper resettlement channels creates a difficult matrix that compounds the categorisation of the displacement. Some displaced people were given a financial compensation, but there were no concrete plans as to where they would settle after leaving their homes. Although a three-phase relocation approach was initially mooted, it was not implemented, with government corruption, lack of planning and other inefficiencies cited as responsible for the failure to carry out an ordered resettlement process (Hove 2016). The three-phase plan aimed at resettling people according to priority based on their proximity to the dam and associated risks. The first phase would target 1 247 families regarded as at risk by 2013. Phase Two would move 1 878 families, whilst the last would move 3 268 families who inhabited the peripheral areas of the dam (Zikhali 2018). But the area that was marked for the resettlement did not have any social amenities. Actual construction of the dam began even before all affected people had been moved and the majority was yet to receive its financial compensation (Hove 2016; Mucherera and Spiegel 2021). Hence, when the dam flooded unexpectedly because of the high rains, people had to be moved forcibly to a transit camp in Chingwizi area, where they stayed until the government started a slow process of resettlement. The lack of planning led some to question the government's sincerity, with conspiracy theories that the dam had been deliberately flooded to induce those who were resisting displacement to move (Hove 2016).

The emergency forced government to declare a state of emergency, which had the consequence that all plans were temporarily suspended. Even people considered not in immediate danger by the flooding were evacuated. To complicate matters, the displaced were instructed to build their own temporary shelters at their newly parcelled plots at the Chingwizi resettlement site, as the government anticipated they would have to move a second time because of contestations over the land at Chingwizi (Mucherera and Spiegel 2021). Considering this lack of a clear resettlement pattern, this article considers the Tugwi-Mukosi displacement as a classic case of forced displacement: in Phase One and Phase Two, the process resembled resettlement; but when disaster struck, the process became one of forced displacement as people were obliged to move to the transit camp. From there the process paradoxically reverted back to one of resettlement. The Zimbabwean experience, thus, does not fit neatly into the accepted models of displacement and resettlement (see Cernea 1998; Scudder and Colson 2019; Cohen 2013) that emphasise that displacement only applies as analytical category if the displaced persons do not end up worse off than in their original status (Cernea 1998).

Development-induced displacements in Zimbabwe have always appeared to follow the same *modus operandi*, with the state focusing more on the development project rather than on the people negatively affected by it. As Nhodo (2020) notes, the people from Tugwi-Mukosi were seen as being in the way of development. Chris de Wet (2005) has made the same observation on dam projects and displacement in South Africa. The people's presence was considered inconvenient for the project, but they possessed limited rights and means to object as the development project took precedence over their own livelihoods and needs. As noted in other displacement areas in Zimbabwe like Marange, Kariba or Chisumbanje, displaced people often do not end up in a better position than before, the destruction of their livelihoods and their side-lining often making them victims of development (Gukurume and Nhodo 2020; Matanzima 2021). For Mutepfa, Dengu and Chenje (1998), the history of Zimbabwe from colonialism to postcolonialism has always been defined by the use of institutionalised violence in situations of displacement. In the colonial era,

the state used its repressive apparatus to displace Africans from their ancestral land and push them into native reserves. In the postcolonial era, the black Zimbabwean government has continued to use the same approach when faced with the development-displacement paradox. Thus several development-induced displacements have ensued and, just as in the Tugwi-Mukosi project, have been characterised by violence. These projects included, but were not limited to, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, Operation Restore Order, and the development of the Chiadzwa diamond fields and Chisumbanje sugar plantations (Gukurume and Nhodo 2020).

Forced displacement poses numerous problems for displaced populations, regardless of the factors leading to the displacement. In Zimbabwe, cultural factors are generally not considered in development matters as quantitative indices are given priority. These include economic indicators such as a rise in incomes and the potential stimulation of economic growth. In their analysis of contestations surrounding Nharira Hills and the surrounding area, Morreira and Iliff (forthcoming) point out the destruction of heritage sites of significant cultural and religious value to make way for mining and factory production. Of note is the importance attached to the dead, who are considered “the living dead,” eternal inhabitants of ecological spaces amongst indigenous communities. In the same vein, the displaced people from Tugwi and Mukosi areas struggle to come to terms with the disruption of their cultural fabric through the construction of the dam. Hence, the occurrence of death is a trigger for the cultural violations and trauma experienced by the displaced. It allows us to see the different ways in which displacement continues to traumatise victims through the disruption of symbolic cultural practices and activities.

Situating death and death rituals within the broader Shona and Karanga cultures

The phenomenon of death is accorded deep social significance in Zimbabwean communities. It is an unwritten social rule in Karanga¹ society that all adults in the community should congregate when someone dies and render services as well as mourn the deceased. Death is accorded such importance that community members are expected not to do anything considered to be work on the day of the death itself and the following day, and this includes work in the fields. These days of mourning and remembrance are called *mahakurimwi* [no farming]. Death is thus so important as to require the stoppage of the most central and crucial component of rural communities’ peasant economy.

In death there is honour and dishonour; there is religion; there is community; and there is home. The way a person dies may be considered honourable or dishonourable. How the person is buried, too, can be honourable or dishonourable (Chitakure 2020). In the Karanga tradition, an honourable death is when a person (especially an elderly one) dies surrounded by family; and an honourable burial is when the person is buried on ancestral (family) land, with full observance of Karanga rituals to prepare the dead person for afterlife as an ancestral spirit in the spiritual realm. This is particularly necessary for elderly deceased (Pwiti and Mahachi 1991). The ancestral spirits will, in turn, look after all family members and protect them from harm (Vambe 2009). An important aspect is that dishonour in death applies eternally since death is the stage in a Karanga person’s life that links the deceased with afterlife, regardless of the religious belief system the person embraced in life. Death must be honourable, to the extent that all the living are expected to speak well of the deceased, even if the person might have perpetrated misdeeds in life. This is captured in the popular Karanga idiom *wafawanaka* [anyone who dies becomes good] (Hove 2017). It is against this background that the bifurcated tragedy of death and displacement invokes so much pain and distress for those no longer living in their ancestral homes. It is a perpetual reminder of the loss of that which is important in a Karanga person’s life. The loss of home and land, the loss of heritage and family culture and, as such, the loss of honour. In Karanga tradition, these are the linchpins of a person’s *unhu/ubuntu*.

Displacement is more than the loss of physical resources like buildings or land, which are replaceable: the psychological harm caused by displacement can have far-reaching consequences. The destruction of honour brings with it an element of shame, a feeling of inadequacy and the fear

of becoming the *kuva chiseko chenyika* [laughing stock] of the community. Death brings these feelings together so that, rather than simply mourning the deceased, death amongst the displaced brings with it the mourning of *honour*. It marks how the psychological and sociocultural fabric of the community has been torn apart: death is a reminder of the shameful loss of the very elements that define a person and personhood. These are social costs, causing stress among vulnerable communities. Scudder (2005) argues that this form of stress contains physiological, psychological and sociocultural components. Our study reflects on the sociocultural component of stress, which is an unwanted product of loss of religion, culture, cosmology, age-old activities, livelihoods and the disempowerment and marginalisation of traditional cultural activities around death and the disposal of the dead. To augment the observations, we examine the deaths of several influential figures in the community, deaths that inspired this article.

Just as for many Zimbabwean cultural groupings, for the Karanga in the Masvingo rural areas the living and the ancestors are inextricably interwoven. Consequently, death rituals have several functions that link the dead, the ancestors and the living. Many of the rituals performed for the dead mark a transition from “the real world into the revered ancestral world” (Bourdillon 1976). Amongst the Shona, social identity and status do not end with death but persist into the grave and beyond. Thus, many of the death rituals performed reflect the identity and social standing of the dead. The displacement of the Tugwi-Mukosi people, therefore, creates problems for the proper observation of death rituals.

Much as modernity and/or urbanisation have highly transformed cultural practices in Zimbabwe (Chitakure 2020), “honourable” death and disposal of the dead have been resilient aspects of Karanga cultural practices, playing into the politics of displacement amongst the Tugwi-Mukosi people at Chingwizi. In recent times this has become apparent with the increased rate of death caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. On one hand, the state calls for strict observation of protocols and guidelines issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Zimbabwean Ministry of Health and Child Welfare to deal with the dead, thus limiting the movement of bodies from one province to another; on the other hand, autochthons are treating their dead in terms of the “honourable-dishonourable” principle and are calling for the disposal of the dead to take place in accordance with this. It should be underscored that just like urbanisation and modernity, migration has also led to the restructuring of death and the disposal of the dead, particularly in light of Zimbabwe’s ever-increasing diasporic community. This community attaches particular significance on returning the body *kudzosa mufi kumba* [home] for a proper and honourable burial with the correct rituals. It is widely believed that failure to do so can eventually turn the deceased’s spirit into a wandering spirit that haunts the family (Gelfand 1970; Kapenzi 1974; Vambe 2009). For the Karanga people, death also helps to reinforce a sense of community in the face of disruptive factors such as migration, urbanisation, religion and modernity. Thus, in rural Masvingo it is an expectation that every family member should attend the funeral and perform the expected death rituals when a community member dies.

Ethnographies of death

We now present ethnographic accounts given by displaced Tugwi-Mukosi villagers on sociocultural experiences of death and the cultural/symbolic meanings allocated to it. The experiences are presented in the form of first-person narratives told by each of the four authors of this article. All four are resident anthropologists who link the emic with the etic approach to understanding the paradox surrounding displacement, death and the disposal of the dead. Each researcher was directly or indirectly affected by both displacement and the processes of disposing of the dead in the wake of the Tugwi-Mukosi dam project. This raises important methodological questions about the use of auto-ethnography and its value in presenting cultural experience (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011). Two of the researchers have direct family links with the displaced, whilst the other two can be considered resident anthropologists by virtue of their membership

to the greater ethnic group under study. The study, therefore, utilises ethnographic methods and personal experiences to produce a broader picture of the experiences of the displaced.

Researcher 1: The big tree has fallen in an unfamiliar territory, displacement and the dilemma of how to dispose of the patriarch

My grandfather was held in high esteem in the family, the eldest member after his brother had passed away a few years before the displacement. He was a prominent member of the community and a religious figure of esteem as evidenced by the name by which he was called in the community, *muparidzi* [preacher]. During his prime, he was an accomplished farmer who also had a decent home — now submerged in water. When the dam flooded, he briefly went to Chingwizi, where the displaced were being relocated. However, due to his old age, he could not stay long, and it was agreed he would stay at the local cathedral in the house designated for the local pastor. The temporary housing at Chingwizi was not only lonely but deprived the displaced of the opportunity to pursue any land-based livelihoods since they no longer had any fields, save for backyard gardens. My grandfather received a part of the monetary reparation promised to the displaced and with it managed to buy a stand at the local Ngundu shopping centre. He went on to construct a house on the “crammed” 260 m² council stand. The construction was only made possible with the intervention of other family members since the compensation money he received was not sufficient to pay for all of it. It is in this “urbanised” rural setting that he lived his last days, unable to engage in most of the experiences he had enjoyed in his life, deprived of the opportunity to live the way he was used to and enjoy the prestigious status as owner of a *musha* [traditional home]. The urban has never been viewed as imbued with dignity by the displaced in general and the Karanga in particular. For this reason, even when people move to urban areas, they still build homes in rural areas that they visit on a regular basis. As noted by Machoko (2020, 475): “Despite an increasing number of Zimbabweans living, educated and owning houses in urban centres in Zimbabwe and in foreign countries, they still regard their decrepit rural abodes as their spiritual home and a place for their burials when they die.”

It ought to be underscored that elderly Karanga, who are the vanguards of culture, associate urban life with *urombe* [vagranity]. For Africans like my grandfather, one’s ancestral land is the source of pride and social and economic wellbeing (Mutopo, Chiweshe and Mubaya 2015). Since he had failed to establish a new home in Chingwizi, the family’s only option upon his death was to perform his burial in the business centre, using the urban cemetery where people “without a home” are buried. It should be reiterated that, in the *matongo* [former places of residence, pl. *wematongo*], burial sites were always revered by both family and clan, especially when important family figures were buried (more on the *matongo* below). Karanga also place significance on certain burial rituals. The public cemetery where my grandfather, the family patriarch, was laid to rest did not provide the privacy and setting to perform the important post-burial rituals, causing feelings of dishonour in the family regarding his burial in a public cemetery, far removed from kith and kin. Apart from the fact that an urban cemetery is a public place, the discomfort of mourning in an urbanised place presented a further dishonourable experience for our grieving family: the “crammed” space meant that we had to pitch a tent in the middle of the road, thus inconveniencing the neighbours. This impelled us to hurry the funerary processes as people wanted to finish and clear the area as quickly as possible. The feeling of dishonour associated with my grandfather’s burial was palpable in the words of one family member: “Sekuru varashwa apa, hazvidi munhu mukuru” [Our grandfather has been dumped here, this is not dignified for an old man].

Researcher 2: Displacement, death and the politics of disposing of the Queen Mother

During my doctoral research, I met Tete Chibaya.² She was staying with her younger brother Zivheya and the two became important respondents in the study. They were instrumental in introducing me to other respondents. I created rapport with them to the extent that I would stay

at their place during the fieldwork. I managed to build a strong bond with them based on our shared *wematongo* in the Tugwi-Mukosi community. Nhodo (2020) argues that the concept of the *wematongo* is very important for displaced Tugwi-Mukosi people to deal with the vagaries of life in an alien territory. It is imperative for creating bonding social capital that is closely linked to familial ties (see Agrawal 2008). The relationship was further reinforced by the fact that the three of us shared the *shumba* [lion] totem. Thus, Tete Chibaya would address me as *muzukuru* [grandson].

During my interactions with Tete Chibaya and Zivheya, I learnt that the two had been respected figures in their community and family in the pre-displacement social context. Tete Chibaya had been an important mother figure in the family; she still retained the position of Queen Mother. She often narrated the harrowing experience of displacement following the flooding of their ancestral land. The displacement had dislocated her entire traditional family structure. Many of her children could not bear the relocation to the unfamiliar Chingwizi area and decided to look elsewhere for places to stay. As she explained:

Patakadzingwa nedhamu vana vangu nevazukuru vose vakaoma zvirinani kunogara havo kudhorobha uko vanorenda dzimba, vakangoita rumwe muZimbabwe, vamwe ndovakatizira Joni. [After being displaced by the flooding, my children and grandchildren opted to rent accommodation in cities all over Zimbabwe, and others went to South Africa.]

Due to her own advanced age, she could not manage life at Chingwizi on her own and decided to stay with her brother Zivheya, who is also a widower.

I became so close to Tete Chibaya that during my spare days and even in the evenings she would narrate her life experiences from childhood to marriage, to being a mother figure in her family. She even told me about personal and health matters. And when her experiences threatened to overwhelm her, I would encourage her to be strong as she usually was. In one discussion she disclosed that she was suffering from a life-threatening illness that she attributed to witchcraft. The remoteness and inadequate health facilities at Chingwizi meant that she had to rely on traditional medicine and faith healing to counter the curse. At some point, she had to pay a traditional healer, who ameliorated her debilitating health condition, with her remaining three cattle. When my fieldwork came to an end in 2020, I promised to continue to visit the two as they had come to view me as part of the family.

In February 2021, a colleague at the University of KwaZulu-Natal asked me to accompany him to the Chingwizi area for his PhD research. He hoped to use my social networks to do research in this area, considering its remoteness and the suspicion with which Tugwi-Mukosi people treated outsiders. As was usual for me, I hoped for us to stay with Tete Chibaya and Zivheya. That is when I was informed that Tete Chibaya had eventually succumbed to the chronic illness she had been suffering from. As we sat around the fire, Zivheya narrated the heartbreaking death of the Queen Mother and the sociocultural and practical challenges the family faced to accord her a “proper” burial. As for all other Tugwi-Mukosi, their relocation to a one-hectare plot in Chingwizi was a transitory measure and the family knew it could not bury her in this place. As a mother figure, she needed to be buried in a dignified and permanent place. To bury her in Chingwizi would require the exhumation and reburial of her body during the final, third relocation phase. But the overcrowded one-hectare plot did not provide the necessary space for a burial. Finally, the family decided to bury her in the city of Masvingo, even though they only had limited resources to do so and despite the fact that such a burial, particularly for a respectable woman like Tete Chibaya, is contrary to the cultural expectations of the Karanga peoples. Reflecting on the experience, Zivheya indicated that he had wanted his sister to be accorded a befitting burial, in line with Karanga culture, and that it was painful that they were unable to do so: “Ipapo pasisina zvekuita hatingati takavachengetera kuMasvingo asi takavarashira Masvingo asi zvinorwadza” [During that time, we had limited options, we cannot say that we buried her in Masvingo. Instead, we dumped her there and it is painful]. Given the location of the burial place, he was unsure how they were going to perform the required post-burial rituals for his sister and questioned how her spirit would come back to protect the family, which is also scattered around Zimbabwe, owing to the forced displacement.

Researcher 3: Displacement, politics of space and the paradox of “burning the body”

To gain a deeper understanding of the sociocultural implications by death for displaced people, I looked at the case of a young family that lost a child in late 2019. The Tugwi-Mukosi relocations occurred just as the young man had married and was starting a family. He had thus not yet established his rural home, one of the hallmarks of adult life. His father possessed significant wealth and was a beneficiary of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe. Thus, when the father was relocated, rather than move to the uninhabitable Chingwizi resettlement area, he bought a house at a growth centre along the highway and closer to his farm and settled there with his family. This strategy of buying a house after resettlement was one deployed by the affluent to avoid the vagaries and trauma associated with life at Chingwizi. As a result, remote Chingwizi became a residential area for the poor and marginalized (Nhodo 2020). The young man thus became a resident of a city in Masvingo where he operated an informal business. But then his baby son fell seriously ill and had to be transferred to Harare for treatment, where, unfortunately, he passed away.

The parents faced the dilemma of where to bury their son, since they no longer had any place to relate to as rural home. The father had not helped them secure land in the Chingwizi resettlement area but also did not provide them with a portion of the father’s stand where the latter now lived with his younger wife and family. They could not bury the body in Harare where no one would come to visit the burial place. In the end they opted for cremation, something that was cheaper than transporting the body to Masvingo but also something that was unheard of in local burial rituals (Shoko 2008). Cremation contradicted not only local customs but also the Christian beliefs the young family subscribed to. As the preacher at another funeral remarked during the burial rites:

Tinotenda mukumuka komuviri. ... Kana pane vamwe vafundisi vanotenda mukumuka komuviri ndinokusheedzai muuye tizobatsirana kudyara muviri uyu uchimirira rumuko. [We believe in the resurrection of the body. ... If there are other pastors who believe in the resurrection of the body, I invite you to help me as we plant this body as it awaits the resurrection.]

In light of these religious beliefs, the cremation of the child’s body raised a difficult question amongst the Tugwi-Mukosi people: How can the body rise again when it has been reduced to ashes? In Karanga society, this kind of practice is often associated with the disposal of the bodies of unwanted elements in society such as thieves, murderers, or witches, to prevent their spirits from coming back (Mwandayi 2011). Even amongst the Christians in the displaced community, the belief was that one’s spirit goes to heaven after death and becomes part of life after death (more on this below). They also believed that the grave is not only the resting place of the deceased’s spirit but also a place of waiting [*rinda*]. Cremation makes this impossible because it means that the deceased person does not have a physical grave. The Karanga categorise people who have no known grave as *mashavi* [wandering spirits], something that in Karanga cosmology is not only undesirable but dangerous (Bourdillon 1976; Gelfand 1970). But to this young family, even though cremation was thus clearly dishonourable, it was the most practical decision to take, considering the barriers that stood in the way of a proper burial.

Researcher 4: Temporality and the disposal of the dead at Chingwizi

We have already noted that the temporality and precarity of the resettlement at Chingwizi presented a serious dilemma for the Tugwi-Mukosi people when it came to disposing of their dead. As I interacted with my kinsmen, I observed that many of them, particularly the elderly and custodians of indigenous culture, were not comfortable with burying the dead in the allocated and transitory one-hectare plots. Over and above the limited space the plots provided for disposing of the dead in a dignified manner, there were a number of questions that created fear and anxiety for the Tugwi-Mukosi people:

- What will happen to the graves of the beloved ones upon the third and final relocation from Chingwizi?

- Will the state exhume these bodies and rebury them in the final resettlement place?
- Would such an exhumation and reburial even be culturally acceptable to the dead and would-be ancestors?

The unpalatable relations between the state and the displaced Tugwi-Mukosi community, and the government's unfulfilled promises, further compounded this anxiety. The state had already promised to exhume the bodies of the dead from the *matongo* area for reburial in the final relocation phase, in line with the cultural expectations of the autochthonous Tugwi-Mukosi people, but nothing had been done to that effect. Some of the displaced lamented the fact that the graves of their relatives were now engulfed by water; with the sudden flooding of the dam, there had been no opportunity to exhume them in time. An elder's remark that "midzimu yedu iri mumvura" [our ancestral spirits are in the water] shows the pain that is associated with the water's destruction of burial shrines. It also shows how the Tugwi-Mukosi people endow death and burial with a sense of permanence. Burial sites are revered and should be kept clean, and the fact that ancestral graves were now underwater symbolised for them the type of disrespect that could bring calamity on to living family members. In this context, the temporality of the resettlement at Chingwizi was linked with a sense of confusion, anxiety and despair. This was made evident in the deaths and burials of elderly men and women who were believed to be custodians of local culture. For the Tugwi-Mukosi displaced, exhuming the dead for reburial was one of the preconditions for relocation; and it remains a sensitive issue for those displaced at Chingwizi. As such the temporality of the relocation at Chingwizi presents a dilemma for the exhumation of the bodies of dead relatives in the *matongo*, because this can only be done to the final relocation area. For Shona in general and Karanga in particular, the dead, and especially the head of the family, are always present in the physical and spiritual realm, constituting "the living dead." They are omnipresent and protect the living in times need. During the liberation struggle, the "dead living" played an important role amongst the Shona. Thus, within broader Zimbabwean state philosophy, the identification, reburial, ritual cleansing and memorisation of the dead living is highly significant (Fontein 2009).

Death, hope and the reconfiguration of the sense of community amongst the displaced

We now turn to analyse the ways in which the experience of death opens up the world of the displaced victims. The experiences we saw above speak not only to death rituals but also to other sociocultural values that are brought into perspective by the incidence of death. Often social reality seems given until it is confronted by particular events and circumstances (Crehan 2011). The taken-for-granted social reality becomes manifest as people come to terms with the physical realities of death. We interrogate how death speaks to community, belonging, home, religion and ubuntu. The four ethnographic vignettes above are snapshots of the sociocultural experiences of the displaced; in the following sections we examine the dilemmas death presents and the enduring nature of Karanga values even in the face of displacement-induced disruptions of social life.

Belonging and community are often aspects that are reaffirmed in death. Death rituals are usually seen as increasing community bonding as people set aside their differences to come together at such a tragic moment. The loss of a person is often taken to be a loss to the community; hence the tendency of everyone empathising and participating in death rituals. Much as the displaced have been scattered because of displacement, death and the disposal of the dead inevitably reconfigure the hitherto fragmented community and familial bonds. A common strategy deployed at Chingwizi to avoid the challenges posed by forced displacement was to repatriate bodies back to the traditional *matongo* area. Whilst this enabled families to perform the full traditional rituals, it also offered the opportunity for the displaced to commiserate with relatives who had not been affected by the flooding and had remained living in the higher-lying Chivi and Mushawasha areas. This virtue is summed up by a speaker at a funeral Researcher 2 attended in Chivi:

Kutanga ndinoda kutenda hama dzangu dzekuChingwizi dzaziva kudzosa mudzi wemusha uno kumatongo, zvinhu zvakakosha izvozvo. Chechipiri regai ndisimbise kuti, Kunyari tichirwadziwa

nekurasikirwa kwataita, izvi zvatipa mukana mukuru wokuumbiridza ukama zvichitevera kuparadzaniswa kwatakaitwa nezvakaitika. Nokudaro ndinokurudzira kuti tirambe tichitaura nekuumbiridza hukama hwedu kune avo vanga vasingazivane. Ndatenda hangu. [First, I wish to thank our relatives from Chingwizi for the appreciation of the importance of bringing back the root to the *matongo*; it's very important for us. Second, let me emphasise that as much as we are in pain because of the loss, this has accorded us an opportunity to strengthen our relations following the displacement. Having said that, I wish to encourage you to continue talking to each other and strengthen relations, going forward. I thank you.]

At the many funerals that we attended, we observed that age, or gerontocracy, was an important factor that was taken into consideration in decisions to repatriate the dead to the *matongo* area. Many of those that were thus repatriated were elders who were considered in the families to have both religious and cultural significance (more on this in the next section). Yet even funerals and death rituals performed at Chingwizi, in situations where the deceased could not be repatriated to the *matongo*, helped reinvigorate the sense of community and solidarity, both among the displaced at Chingwizi and between them and those still living in the place of origin. This was captured succinctly in a speech by the key speaker at a funeral in Chingwizi. He said:

Chekutanga ndinoda kutenda hama dzedu dzebheria society dzatinadzo nezvadzatiitira pano. Chechipiri ndoda kutenda vakarabwa, vanakomana nevanasikana vedu pane zvavakaita kubvira pakurwara nepakuvigwa kwaamai. Chechitatu ndoda kutendazve vavakidzani vedu nerudo rwavo, kunyanya Mai Rhozi, regai nditi simukai muonekwe navanhu. Ngatimbovaomberera maoko. Regai ndipedzisire nekutenda hama neshamwari vatabata navo vabva kumatongo, Mukosi, Masangula nekuNyuni, rudo rwavo nerutsigiro rwavo rurambe rwakadero. Ngativaomberere maoko zvekare. Ndinokutendai mese zvakare. [First, I would like to thank members from the burial society here present for their role. Second, I wish to thank our in-laws, sons and daughters for the work done from illness up until we buried our mother. I also want to thank our neighbours for their love, particularly Amai Rhozi — may you please stand up so that they can see you. Let us clap hands for her. Let me finish by thanking our friends and relatives from *matongo*, surrounding villages and Mufula and Masangula. Your love and support should be maintained, let us also clap hands for them. Once more, I thank you all.]

Death, displacement and religion

In both the Christian and the indigenous Karanga (Tugwi-Mukosi) beliefs, the issue of death embodies a certain degree of reverence, fear and sacredness. Both forms of belief see death as marking a transition into the next world, which is often construed as better than the conditions of the living. The transition must correspond to certain qualities and qualifications that determine whether the dead qualify for admittance to the next world. These qualities include the person's lifestyle and way of living. For Christians, this determines whether the deceased will enter into heaven or be condemned to eternal hell. In Karanga beliefs, it determines the acceptability of the deceased into the *nyikadzimu* [land of the ancestors] and whether the deceased can become a *mudzimu* [guardian spirit] for the family or clan. The most important aspect affected by displacement is the issue of how one is buried. Burial rituals and the burial place are important in both Christianity and Karanga beliefs. The cases presented above also present the dilemma presented by displacement to the religious belief systems of the displaced. The Karanga consider the grave a shrine where certain rituals must be performed. Hence, displacement meant a loss of a family's shrines, whilst burying people in alien lands was seen to disrupt their ability to become *mudzimu*. As one elder noted: "Munhu akavigwa musango ratova shavi" [If a person is buried in the wilderness, he becomes a wandering spirit]; thus, being buried in a common place away from home was equated with condemning the deceased to be a wandering spirit, open to be harnessed by other individuals for gain rather than enabled to look after the wellbeing of the own family.

For some Christians, burial was important since it signified "sleeping" and was equated to planting a seed in the ground. The body was likened to the seed that will experience rebirth at the resurrection of the dead. Hence, the body was sacred and not to be tampered with. Novel practices such as cremation did not sit well with either of these belief systems. The pastor at

one of the funerals had this to say: “How then will the body resurrect when you have burnt it?” Burning was also linked with fear, as it evoked the Christian conception of hell, an eternal fire that burns the souls of all those condemned to it. Hence cremation, though a sensible option given the circumstances of displacement to Chingwizi, remained unthinkable for most of the displaced. Death brought uncomfortable questions and uncomfortable death rituals that were contrary to the belief systems of the displaced. Karanga beliefs, too, maintained the sacredness of the body since they posited a move into another world at the death of a person (Saidi 2017). Therefore, the way the body is disposed of should be dignified. The burning of the body, thus, constituted a destruction that did not sit well in these communities.

Memory, reunifications and funeral wakes

In the lives of the Karanga, death is not only a loss but an opportunity to bring family members closer again. This is expressed in this popular funeral greeting: “Ttongoshonganiswa naidzodzi dzinotambudza” [We are brought together by this trouble]. Death in this context is a powerful tool for reuniting and reaffirming clan relations. Funeral attendance is expected for all adults; and if someone fails to attend, they are expected to pay homage to the deceased at the earliest convenience. The study noted that although displacement scattered people in various directions, death was an indirect way of reuniting families and thus keeping kinship ties alive. From the conversations of men around the fire during the funeral wake, one could hear discussions full of mixed emotions, both happy memories and grief, both hope and mourning, as the family is rejuvenated through the uniting power of death. Death is a tragedy that nonetheless ensures the family catches up with developments in the kin group. Family members hear about accomplishments their kin have achieved and are informed of upcoming life events as they see each other and talk on the sidelines of the funeral.

The funeral wake also provides an important platform for people to reminisce and engage in nostalgic conversations. In a way, the celebration of the departed created memories of home and of events that marked the life of the deceased. It provides a stage for revealing what the family stands for and the common ground drawn by the idea of belonging. It also evokes elements of group solidarity and membership within the family unit. Hope for a common future and continued familial ties are rekindled in platforms like the funeral wake. It is a time when long lost members restore and reaffirm their kinship ties, leading to the happy mood that can permeate the wake. We even observed at Chingwizi that some such conversations could mislead a passer-by as to their nature due to the absence of an atmosphere of mourning.

Recreating home

The feelings of home have been significantly altered by displacement. As noted earlier, an attachment to place is an essential component of Karanga culture. At birth, the umbilical cord is buried in the hut that serves as kitchen. At death, the body lies in state in this same hut, thus signifying the important attachment of home in Karanga culture. The individual is always connected to the home. Life begins and ends in the same place. Other ritual activities are also connected to this place. Though, with the passage of time, some of the ritual practices are forgotten or overlooked in the face of cultural and religious change, the sentimental value of the home remains very much alive. Displacement has had significant effects on the displaced persons’ symbiotic relationship with home, such that they have responded by looking for avenues to recreate this home. In death, such recreations have been fostered by practices such as the creation of common burial sites. Some families have tried to establish central burial sites closer to their former homes in the *matongo* area. As noted in the first ethnographic vignette above, the decision was taken to bury the body at a cemetery in the nearest business centre. A house at that business centre also acted as common meeting point for the family and thus became the new home for family gatherings to take place.

Other displaced have tried to recreate “home” by drawing on the *matongo* concept. In the area where they settled, they used familial and village arrangements as basis for a reorganisation. Traditional leadership, for example, tried to recreate the living arrangements from the *matongo* by naming the villages with the same names and retaining traditional leadership structures. Such arrangements helped maintain and strengthen bonding social capital, a key ingredient for adaptation in times of adversity (Agrawal 2008).

A significant number of displaced Tugwi-Mukosi persons have maintained contact with their relatives who were spared displacement. Through the mobilisation of linking and bonding social capital, the *matongo* is used by bereaved families to bury their dead in a procedure known as *kudzosera mufi kumusha* [returning the deceased home]. This agentic strategy helps these families avoid the vagaries of burying their dead at Chingwizi. This shows the tenacity of the displaced to adapt and build resilience, not only regarding their livelihoods but in the complex political context of death and disposition of the dead at Chingwizi.

Rethinking death and dignity

Our experiences with the Tugwi-Mukosi displacement and experiences of death have raised a number of observations in relation to death, honour and the relationship that exists between the living and the dead. Morreira and Iliff (forthcoming) note that land and sacred spaces are important to indigenous groups in Zimbabwe. This resonates with our discussions of honour and dignity, brought into perspective by death. The final resting place is of significance, and the way a person’s remains are handled by the living bestows on the dead honour and dignity, a matter of great sociocultural significance. The discourse of development and modernity has represented an onslaught on the essence of people’s dignity and existence. In this manner Zimbabwe has followed a trajectory of development at the expense of human dignity, as evidenced in the disruption caused in the lives of the displaced communities (Morreira 2020). Since in Karanga cosmology death signifies a transition to another state, ubuntu does not end the moment a person dies. The reverence shown towards an individual in fact increases in death, as seen in the mysticism that characterises death rituals (Hove 2017). Displacement disrupts this intricate process of honour and dignity in the lives of the Karanga. In death we see the pain and shame of displacement relived as people endure another reminder of that which they lost — a connection to home and to place.

Death also allows us to see the importance of collective social bonds amongst the Karanga. Human dignity, or ubuntu, continues in death and is a powerful force uniting the departed and the living and is responsible for the creation of what Chekero and Morreira (2020) refer to as an ethical being. Ubuntu, mutualism and conviviality are, therefore, reinforced through death and the disposal of the dead. These forms of collective personhood are important in the formation of social capital, networks and social bonds amongst the displaced and between them and the wider Karanga community (Chekero and Morreira 2020; Mbigi 2005). Death is a point at which there is a reaffirmation of the important components of local people’s ubuntu. Even though displacement has resulted in scattered settlements, where people are removed from their close kith and kin, death is an instrument that often reunites members of the social group.

Conclusion

Our study brings to the fore the dynamics that characterise the existential conditions of those that had to endure forced displacement. The concept and experiences of death give us an important peephole through which to understand the long-term effects of displacement on communities. Through death, we catch a glimpse of the post-displacement sociocultural and religious conditions of the displaced. Death allows us to understand the dilemmas, anxieties, pain and hopes experienced by the displaced. It enables us to see the effects of destructive episodes of human existence, but it also allows us to understand the enduring and resilient nature of humanity, as communities rebuild from the ashes and usher in new sociocultural arrangements. Whilst we as

researchers underscored the fears and anxieties that engulfed the displaced regarding death and death rituals, our emphasis has been on how the displaced as rational, calculative and strategic actors redefine their social situation in line with the orthodox and/or cultural expectations, albeit living under conditions of uncertainty. Displacement robs communities of the soul of their identities and the emotional attachment to the place called home.

Notes

1. The Karanga people are one part of the multi-dialectical autochthonous Shona peoples in Zimbabwe. In general, the Shona comprise the Zezuru (located mainly in metropolitan Zimbabwe), the Korekore (in northern Zimbabwe), the Manyika (in eastern Zimbabwe) and the Karanga, amongst other categories (Bourdillon 1976; Shoko 2008). Geographically, the Karanga are domiciled in parts of Midlands province and, predominantly, in Masvingo province — including in urban Masvingo, rural and urban Gutu, Chiredzi, Mushawasha, Chivi and Mwenezi. Those displaced to Chingwizi consider Chivi and Mushawasha as their *matongo* [area of origin].
2. For ethical reasons, all personal names used in this article are pseudonyms.

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