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TB truths

Patients' experience with tuberculosis and healthcare in sub-Saharan Africa

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TB in Town 2: an ethnographic film

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What is there to worry if you have a disease that is curable? How much hope do you have to get better in a country with a very well-run health programme? A country where the medication is for free and you can receive financial and psychological support in case needed? How would you feel if this whole system seems out of your reach? This ethnographic film zooms in on Town 2. Town 2 is situated in one of the biggest and most violent townships of South Africa, Khayelitsha. This film tells the story of patients with tuberculosis (TB). A curable disease you see everywhere in the South African townships and spreads so easily through the air. A disease of which so many people have died already. This film is about patients' experience with TB, the medication, and the clinic. How they deal with friends and family. How they cope with side-effects of the medication that are so strong that some are afraid to become crazy. It's about their hunger in combination with treatment that seems to crush them.

The aim of this visual ethnography is to enhance understanding of how complex relations between TB patients, treatment, and a highly developed TB health programme play out in everyday treatment-adherence – that is, continuing TB treatment without interruption. For five months, Cremers conducted research in Town 2, Khayelitsha with her local research assistant, Mr. Maqogi. This film shows how treatment adherence is not exclusively the product of care programmes, providers, or patients' struggles. Rather, treatment adherence is intertwined with patients' flexible and creative processes of survival, coping strategies, and the existence of social networks leading to supportive or stigmatizing actions. This film gives insight into social moments, the state of patients' bodies and minds, their emotions, the impact of extreme poverty and hunger, the mundaneness of death, and how this shapes shifting agencies of TB patients navigating tuberculosis and treatment.

The red thread of this film is death. It begins and ends with a funeral. Throughout the film, the themes death, survival, dying, and struggle are interwoven with the rest of the information and simmer just below the surface. Another important story line is the close social ties within the community. All filmed subjects seem to know each other and take care of each other. Slowly you get to know the different respondents. It appears they additionally have an intimate relationship with the director. The viewer gets the idea of a warm, small community, and may at times forget this story is situated in a township with over one million inhabitants that is called the most violent area of South Africa. The film tries to show different important sides of the patients: as patients taking good care of their health, but also as people fighting for a dignified life.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/259898896>

Password: Tuberculosis

In loving memory of Nokubonga Maqogi (1976–2014) and George Lungile (1963–2015)