

# “They Are Not Leaving Without Their Money”: Exploring Encounters With the State Through Cash Transfers in the Rural Eastern Cape, South Africa

**Stefan Granlund**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0969-390X>

Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural  
Sciences

[stefan.granlund@slu.se](mailto:stefan.granlund@slu.se)

## Abstract

In this article, I explore the ways in which encounters with the state through cash transfers shape state–citizen relations in the rural Eastern Cape, South Africa. I expand on literature that advances an understanding of the way in which state cash transfers can act as a vehicle for either strengthening a sense of citizenship, dignity and entitlement or reproducing inequality, stigmatisation and shame. Using qualitative methods to explore cash transfer recipients’ own lived experiences and drawing on a social justice framework, I illustrate complex state–citizen relations in rural South Africa. Although some recipients perceive grants as a form of charity, there is also a growing sense of entitlement to receiving cash transfers. The interviews and observations suggest that misrecognition has occurred through mistreatment by state officials and extraordinary long queues during a change in service delivery. However, the encounters with state bureaucracy are also potential avenues in which impoverished people see the state and gain recognition, which contributes to a sense of citizenship.

**Keywords:** cash transfers, entitlement, social justice, state–citizen relations, South Africa, Child Support Grant



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## Introduction

South Africa's social security system has seen major controversy and crisis in recent years and this even before the Covid-19 pandemic and its devastating consequences on society (Torkelson 2020). The huge task of delivering social grants, state cash transfers, to roughly 30 per cent of the population (17 million direct beneficiaries) was in jeopardy during a crisis in the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) in 2017 (Breckenridge 2018; Du Toit 2017; Torkelson 2020). The risks of non-payment of social grants have been described as a crisis in the media which could severely affect the lives of the recipients, local economies throughout the country, the post-apartheid state of South Africa and the ruling party, the ANC (Nkosi 2017).

The case of social grants in South Africa is interesting in a context in which cash transfers are increasingly promoted internationally as an important poverty alleviation tool, which is arguably the most successful poverty alleviation tool in post-apartheid South Africa (Patel 2015). However, arguments for state cash transfers also include their potential long-term effects of strengthening state–citizen relationships, in which grant recipients become active citizens with entitlements rather than being passive beneficiaries of state charity (Molyneux, Jones, and Samuels 2016; Patel and Ulriksen 2017). In the light of a national crisis and controversies surrounding the delivery of social grants that so many South Africans today rely on for their livelihoods, questions surrounding the way in which grant recipients understand their grant and the way in which state–citizen relations are shaped and formed become increasingly important.

In this article, I explore the way in which the Child Support Grant (CSG) shapes state–citizen relations through qualitative research in the rural Eastern Cape, South Africa. In particular, I explore recipients' notions of their entitlements in relation to receiving cash transfers and their lived experiences of encounters with the state through social grants service delivery. What do social grants mean for state–citizen relations, for seeing and being seen by the state? Do recipients see social grants as entitlements or merely as a form of charity? An entitlement is here defined as something that cannot be taken away arbitrarily, something the recipient has a right to and can therefore claim (Calhoun 2002). This right implies an obligation on the state, a recognition of a person as a rights holder, connected to ideas of social justice (Fraser and Gordon 1992). The opposite of entitlement, charity, is here defined as something that is voluntarily and benevolently bestowed upon someone in need, but is fundamentally insecure as there is no obligation on the state (Calhoun 2002; Cookson 2018; Spicker, Leguizamon, and Gordon 2007).

The SASSA crisis unfolded in 2017 but stretched back to five years earlier. In 2012, SASSA awarded a tender to Cash Paymaster Services (CPS), a private bank, to deliver social grants. The Constitutional Court, however, declared the tender invalid in 2013, but did not cancel the contract to ensure uninterrupted payment of the social grants to millions of beneficiaries. In 2014, the Constitutional Court ruled that SASSA should put out a new tender to find a new service provider. Instead, SASSA declared its intention to take over the payment of social grants rather than using a private third party provider

at the end of March 2017 when the then current smart cards (used to access the money) were going to expire.

SASSA, however, made little progress to show the Constitutional Court that it could take over the payments and could not guarantee that grants be delivered in a safe and timely fashion by April 2017. This led to a massive public outcry of protests throughout civil society and the media in 2017, forcing the Constitutional Court of South Africa to interfere with the government's inaction to secure the delivery of social grants (Torkelson 2020). A new Constitutional Court order averted a crisis by extending the previously invalid CPS contract by one year. This allowed for the transition of service delivery implementers from CPS to the state-owned South African Post Office, which was a state agency deemed able to take over service delivery of grants. In 2018, the South African Post Office took over the grant payment system; however, the transition still became far from smooth (Breckenridge 2018; Torkelson 2020).

In post-apartheid democratic South Africa, the CSG was introduced in 1998 (Devereux 2011). The CSG is an unconditional cash transfer disbursed every month, targeted at primary caregivers of children aged from 0–18 years under a means test and is, as of 2019, R420/USD33 per child. More than 17 million individuals received social grants in 2019; roughly one third of the whole population. Of these, 12.4 million received the CSG (SASSA 2019; Torkelson 2020). Social grants are redistributed from domestic taxation into the hands of the impoverished population. The expansion of social grants is also nationally driven, without donor support, and grants are a constitutionally protected right that has been argued to contribute to building a social contract between the state and its citizens (Devereux 2011). Yet, not enough research has empirically explored “citizenship in practice” (Gaventa 2010), i.e. how social grant recipients view the state and the ways in which they express a sense of entitlement to a grant (Ferguson and Li 2018; Plagerson, Harpham, and Kielmann 2012).

This article builds on a larger research project in which in-depth longitudinal and rich survey data, including visits to every household, combined with long-term (since 2001) ethnographic field work in two rural villages in the Eastern Cape province, form the basis for a broad understanding of the context into which the CSG was gradually introduced (Granlund 2020; Hajdu 2006).

Although questions of entitlement to state resources are not new when it comes to broader debates about welfare states and social policy in general, they become increasingly significant in times of livelihood change and increasing unemployment rates in low- and middle-income countries where access to the formal labour market is difficult as a livelihood option (Du Toit 2018; Murray Li 2017). Increasingly, research focuses on what it means to receive social grants (the ways in which they play out on the ground) as well the relations between cash transfers and social justice for recipients (Hochfeld and Plagerson 2011; Patel and Ulriksen 2017; Plagerson, Harpham, and Kielmann 2012). In addition, there is emerging attention from anthropologists towards

theorising about new “welfare states” (Ferguson 2015) including exploring their emergence, possibilities, challenges and limits through qualitative research (Olivier de Sardan and Piccolli 2018; Torkelson 2020). This includes understanding the everyday lived experiences of people benefiting from cash transfer programmes across the world.

The article is outlined as follows. The literature review and conceptual framework seek to bring forth different contributions on state–citizen relations in relation to cash transfers, especially with regard to encountering the state and its effects. Following that, I describe the research context and the methods used to capture encounters with the state and the lived experiences of CSG recipients. The succeeding section includes the qualitative analysis from a rural South African setting, which reveals the complexities of social grants and people’s experiences and responses towards state service delivery. Last, I discuss the ways in which social grants come to shape contentious state–citizen relations and the ways in which social grants in particular will only grow in importance for impoverished populations owing to jobless deagrarianisation.

## State–Citizen Relations and Cash Transfers

There is a growing interest in the ways in which cash transfers shape state–citizen relations (Gibbs et al. 2018; Hickey 2011; Molyneux, Jones, and Samuels 2016; Plagerson, Harpham, and Kielmann 2012; Seekings and Nattrass 2015). This section will highlight some of the theorisations of cash transfer recipients’ relations to the state, the different ways in which recipients encounter the state and the ways in which these encounters affect their well-being.

In light of the substantial livelihood changes in southern Africa, Ferguson and Li (2018, 11) note:

In Southern Africa, the old idea of a social grant as a kind of ‘help for the helpless’ charity coexists with a newer line of thinking that identifies state services (including social transfers) as a kind of ‘rightful share’ paid to citizen who may reckon themselves to be owners of the nation (and its mineral wealth). Do recipients of social transfers express a sense of entitlement? Or are they plagued by connotations of dependence and shame linked to moralized ideas of the virtue of work and the shame of ‘idleness’ and ‘handouts’?

Qualitative research in urban South Africa on grant recipients points to a growing sense of being “seen by the state” through social grants (Plagerson, Harpham, and Kielmann 2012), which potentially enhances a form of active citizenship (Ulriksen and Patel 2017). Access to grants has opened up new spaces for state–citizen exchanges and accountability. In their study, Plagerson, Harpham and Kielmann (2012) noted that children were universally seen as entitled to the CSG (in poor communities in Johannesburg) but that the primary caregivers (most often women), who are actually

withdrawing the money on behalf of their children, were less often seen as entitled. Gratitude towards the state was more commonly expressed than entitlement and the recipients also expressed fear of grants being terminated, which suggest a weak contractual relationship with the state (Hochfeld and Plageron 2011; Plageron, Harpham, and Kielmann 2012).

In contrast to being seen by the state and, in so doing, enhancing a sense of citizenship, Auyero's (2011) ethnographic account of poor people waiting for welfare payments in Argentina instead brings forth the concept of "patients of the state". Auyero (2011, 22) argues that being forced to wait in and around the welfare office affects people's sense of entitlement where they come to see the cash transfer as aid or charity – "Sometimes they help you and sometime they don't." In this way, welfare recipients in Argentina learn to wait and to comply, not to voice discontent or to complain as that could result in leaving without the money. Waiting for cash transfers and the uncertainties and arbitrariness of the Argentinian welfare office and its dealings with poor people is according to Auyero (2011, 25):

[. . .] manipulating poor people's time. It is through this practice, through this 'governing technique' that the state seems to be aiming for the creation of a docile body of welfare clients . . . creating subordinate subjects who do not raise their voice . . . who 'know' they have to be patient.

The double meaning of the word "patient" here comes from the interviewed participants in the study, who described waiting at public hospitals as similar to the welfare office: "In both places they have to (silently) endure; they have to act not as citizens with rightful claims but as patients of the state" (Auyero 2011, 23)<sup>1</sup>. In both Argentina and South Africa, predominantly women have to wait and comply. Auyero therefore points out that the patient model is a way in which gender inequalities are being reproduced (Auyero 2011; Cookson 2016). The analysis on the politics of waiting in Argentina is useful here, not because South Africa and Argentina are similar with regard to their economies and social security histories, but because of the deep inquiry of what it means to receive (and not to receive) a cash transfer from the state.

Waiting as an analytical terrain has often been theorised in a broader sense with regard to waiting for adulthood in precarious times (Honwana 2012), doing "timepass" in India owing to the lack of social mobility in times of mass unemployment (Jeffrey 2010) and, from a South African perspective, the long wait for the state with regard to providing subsidised housing for poor people (Oldfield and Greyling 2015). However, the effects of waiting have also been theorised in the more direct and literal sense of actually waiting for one's benefits at the welfare office (Auyero 2011; Carswell, Chambers, and

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1 As Auyero (2011) notes, during the course of fieldwork, there was no sign of the word "right" to the payments in the field notes.

De Neve 2019) or the insecurities associated with waiting to collect social grants in South Africa (Vally 2016). Waiting in line to collect government grants or benefits has been associated in the literature with stigma or state exercise of (malevolent, punitive) power (Auyero 2011; Cookson 2018; Scott 1998). Waiting for a bureaucratic state could be interpreted as demeaning for poor people and making the subjects submissive – an act of power and a form of structural violence (Gupta 2012).

In contrast to this strand of literature, Druza's (2016) analysis of Nepali cash transfer recipients is associated with a "social mechanism that publically demonstrates equality" and linked to social inclusion and well-being. Waiting in a public line to receive cash "gives them a sense of citizenship, rights consciousness, and of feeling included, respected and cared for" (Druza 2016, 64). Here, pay points become not sites of stigma but rather of joy. In rural areas, cash is rare and being seen getting or claiming cash or payment opens up new possibilities and opportunities. This is similar to South African scholar Jonny Steinberg's (2013) account of grant payday in rural Pondoland in the Eastern Cape as sites of joy, bringing impoverished communities to life. As Corbridge et al. (2005) argue, "seeing the state" happens in myriad ways. A poor rural widow in India may be forced to wait in the sun or rain for hours, but she can also occasionally demand her pension and stand her ground through her documents that enable her entitlements to welfare (Corbridge et al. 2005, 20). Empirically studying the responses to waiting for welfare (rather than assuming they are purely negative) is therefore important as a potential signifier of the way in which people relate to the state.

With regard to state bureaucracies and waiting to collect a social grant in South Africa, Breckenridge (2005) argues that the problems associated with applying and claiming social grants (Vally 2016) are not a deliberate form of punishment or act of power to subjugate a population, but rather a manifestation of administrative bureaucratic problems. The South African state and its comprehensive registration of the population was, under apartheid, a tool to control, surveil and subjugate the non-white population, whereas now it is motivated by a project of redistributive social justice (Breckenridge 2005, 270).

Nevertheless, the distribution of benefits to poor people are also sites where encounters with the state through services such as service delivery of social grants can induce stigma and shame by being mistreated and stigmatised by state officials at welfare offices (Gibbs et al. 2018; Roelen 2019; Wright et al. 2015). In addition, recurrent moral discourses in the South African media, from politicians and in communities routinely subject recipients of social grants to disrespect through, for example, constructing women as "self-serving and drains on resources" or by invoking derogatory and disrespectful terms such as *imali yeqolo* (translated from Zulu as "back money", suggesting that women lie on their backs to fall pregnant to get government grants). In particular, *imali yeqolo* is a form of shaming of primarily young black women for having children just to receive grants (Hochfeld and Plageron 2017, 57).

## Framework of Analysis

The above literature review points to different ways of understanding how cash transfers contribute to shaping state–citizen relationships. Distributing social grants as motivated by a project of redistributive social justice brings into focus analytical contributions to social justice relevant to assessing welfare interventions (Fraser 2000, 2003). To explore the ways in which encounters with the state through the CSG shape state–citizen relations in the rural Eastern Cape, I use Fraser’s (2003) concepts of recognition and misrecognition. Fraser’s (2000, 2003) concept of recognition, i.e. participation as a full partner in social life and perceived by society as worthy of respect, concern the social status of individuals (for example, dignity, respect and well-being). I use recognition here also at a state–citizen level. Encountering the state through applying for a grant or collecting a grant can allow impoverished rural populations to gain recognition as rights holders (Leisering 2019) by being seen by the state, which can strengthen their sense of social citizenship through a smooth, effective, secure and dignified process (Carswell, Chambers, and De Neve 2019; Devereux 2013). As Leisering (2019, 148) argues, “turning poor persons into rights-holders reflects a social recognition by politics and society, in addition to the mere fact of receiving money” and therefore contributes to and strengthens a sense of belonging and full membership in society. Fraser and Gordon (1992, 45–46) note the following regarding social citizenship:

In a welfare state citizenship includes an entitlement to social provision – the guarantee of a decent standard of living. It would bring such provision within the aura of dignity surrounding ‘citizenship’ and ‘rights’. People who enjoy ‘social citizenship’ get ‘social rights’, not ‘handouts’. They receive aid while maintaining their status as full members of society entitled to ‘equal respect’.

Misrecognition is therefore defined as “to be denied the status of full partner in social interactions, as consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem” (Fraser 2000, 113–114). An example of misrecognition relevant in a South African context is the stigmatisation of CSG recipients as “sexually irresponsible scroungers” (Fraser 2000, 114). This has elsewhere been labelled as forms of “othering” (Lister 2004) where people living in poverty are routinely subjected to mistrust, deeply rooted negative racialised and gendered stereotypes and stigmatisation that impinge negatively on their well-being and dignity, much in the same way as living in poverty does with regard to economic resources. In contrast, recipients can also encounter misrecognition through being forced to wait in line for too long under adverse weather conditions, being forced to travel long distances to access grants, to not receive the money at all (being excluded) or to experience mistreatment or abuse by government officials, which can produce shame, stigmatisation and loss of dignity (Balen 2018; Cookson 2018; Roelen 2019; Wright et al. 2015). In addition, negative moral discourses including potential failures of social grant service delivery may affect the personal dignity of the recipients, amounting to misrecognition and therefore a lower status position in society affecting their ability to participate as peers in social life (Hochfeld and Plagerson 2011, 2017).

The concepts of recognition and misrecognition are therefore used as a way of shining a light on the different lived experiences of encounters with the state through social grants service delivery. These encounters and wider public discourses can influence the participants' notions of entitlement to the CSG and their sense of citizenship, dignity and well-being.

## Research Context

As mentioned, this article builds on a larger research project using a longitudinal survey, interviews and ethnographic field work (Granlund 2020; Hajdu et al. 2020; Hajdu, Neves, and Granlund 2020). The larger study explored the material and socio-relational implications of state cash transfers (primarily the CSG) in two small rural villages in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The other articles from the project focus on long-term livelihood changes in the villages since 2002 (Hajdu et al. 2020), material effects of the CSG on livelihoods (Hajdu, Neves, and Granlund 2020) and the socio-relational impacts of the CSG on recipients at a more individual and intra-household level (Granlund and Hochfeld 2020). The data collection for this article which focuses on state–citizen relationships built on ethnographic fieldwork in both villages and interviews in one of them, Cutwini.

From a household survey performed in 2016, I purposively selected 33 households for in-depth interviews. The selection included a random mix of participants ensuring that they were spread evenly across the span of (1) primary caregiver ages, ranging from 19-year-old recipients up to 60-year-old recipients, and (2) primary caregivers receiving from one to seven CSGs. The purposive sampling was later combined with convenience sampling by which the participants available by chance are included (Granlund 2020). The CSG recipients interviewed were women but informal discussions with men occurred throughout the research. I also conducted one interview with a man who held the position of ward committee member in Cutwini. All the participants in this study have been given pseudonyms and all participants have granted oral and written consent to participate in the interviews. Between 2016 and 2018, I also observed paydays at different pay points where recipients access the CSG, over a total of six months of ethnographic fieldwork.

The interviews with the participants regarding their lived experiences of applying and accessing social grants from SASSA and the observations during paydays were important as they can be seen as moments of encounters with the state where both recognition and misrecognition can take place. This included observing the general atmosphere during paydays and in what way access to social grants was granted at different locations. This also included probing questions whether the encounter (payday) and applying for grants were perceived in a smooth, effective, secure and dignified way. In the interviews, I asked all the participants directly about their views of being entitled to the grant or not. I also approached the perceptions of state–citizen relations by asking why CSG recipients believe the CSG had been introduced and the



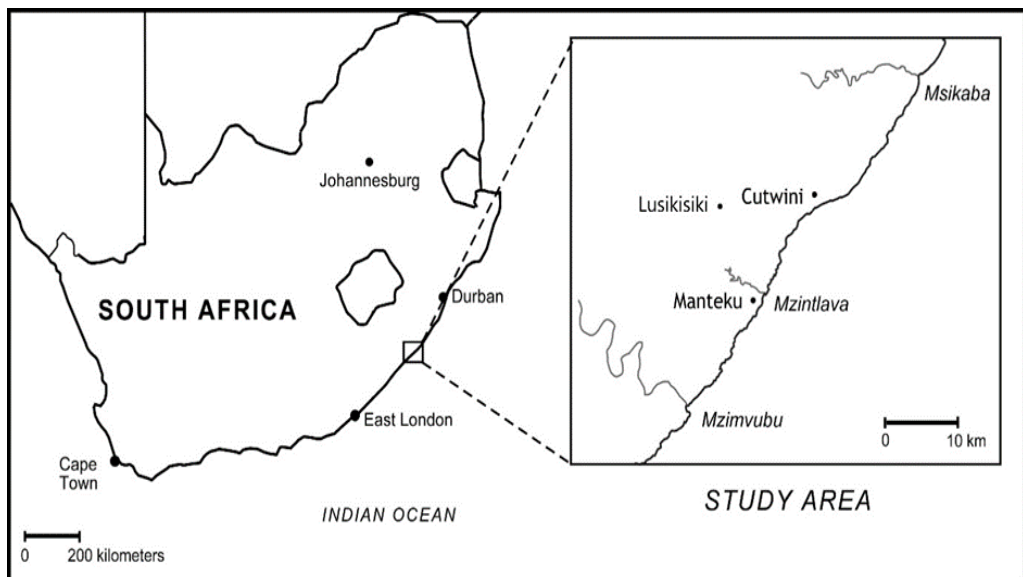
way in which recipients experienced encounters with government officials through the social grant service delivery. Through different observations during social grant paydays, I acquired a deeper understanding of encounters with the state by observing and probing the processes surrounding social grant payments.

This study of exploring CSG recipients' encounters with the state and views of social grants were conducted over three years (2016–2018). This allowed the study to include observations and interviews during different phases of stability and instability of service delivery. In early 2016, the delivery of social grants in the study area was fairly smooth and efficient with armoured trucks accompanying cash dispenser trucks to the villages. In late 2016, early 2017, during the SASSA crisis, the threat of not receiving the social grants was all over the news in South Africa (Thamm 2016) and reached all the way to the most remote rural households in the Eastern Cape. Meanwhile, the grants were still dispensed as usual in Cutwini. The crisis culminated in 2018 when the new service provider – the South African Post Office – took over implementing the delivery of grants from a private company, CPS. News emerged of changed procedures, long queues, money not always being available and technical problems with delivery (Damba-Hendrik et al. 2018). In 2018, when the South African Post Office took over the implementation, the recipients in Cutwini had to travel to the town of Lusikisiki to collect their grants as SASSA decommissioned around 80 per cent of all physical pay points (for example, mobile cash dispensers) (Torkelson 2020).

The transcribed interviews were read several times to gain familiarity with the texts, including field notes from the interviews, informal discussions and observations during paydays. I then coded the transcribed interviews together with field notes manually in themes (Creswell 2014). I generated initial codes manually based on the different answers the participants gave which were then later brought together systematically under themes drawn from the research questions. These include a sense of charity, a sense of entitlement, expectations of the state, stigmatisation, and positive and negative encounters with the state. Particular attention was paid to themes that arose recurrently or were deemed interesting with regard to the research questions, and any arising themes that were unexpected or surprising. The process was iterative, moving back and forth between theory and the transcribed interviews to avoid omitting important aspects on the way in which encounters with the state through cash transfers shape state–citizen relations.

The research was conducted in an area in the former apartheid homeland region of Transkei known as Pondoland, now part of the Eastern Cape province, in a village named Cutwini and the closest town of Lusikisiki (see Figure 1). The rural areas in the Eastern Cape are some of the poorest regions in South Africa, owing to the legacy of apartheid, with relatively poor quality education and poor service delivery (Shackleton and Luckert 2015). Water is still collected in private rainwater tanks or fetched by hand from streams, but electricity has been available in Cutwini since 2011. In 2016, Cutwini consisted of 174 households and around 85 per cent of the households in the village

receive at least one type of social grant. The closest hub of supermarkets and stores is the small but usually busy town of Lusikisiki, some 26 kilometres from Cutwini, approximately an hour's drive away owing to poor road conditions. Minibus taxis drive there at least twice a day, but there is no other form of public transport. Central Lusikisiki consists primarily of one busy main road with shops and eateries and countless minibus taxis that commute there every day, dropping off and picking up people who are there to stock up on food and other necessities in the supermarkets or various other stores. The residents in Cutwini are largely unemployed, but around one third of the households receive some form of income from work, both formal and informal, including public works programmes and casual work such as selling traditional beer, fruit or clothes (Hajdu, Neves, and Granlund 2020).



**Figure 1:** A map of South Africa, showing the village of Cutwini and the town of Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape

## Encounters With the State Through Cash Transfers in the Rural Eastern Cape

Drawing on the different literature on state-citizen relations and encounters with the state regarding cash transfers, I now turn to the lived experiences of CSG recipients in the rural Eastern Cape. I provide data from interviews and observations in the rural village of Cutwini and the town of Lusikisiki between 2016 and 2018. I explore the complexity surrounding the participants' views on social grants, including their notions of either entitlement or charity in relation to the grants. In addition, I explore different encounters with the state through social grant delivery and the ways in which the

participants have experienced both misrecognition through encounters with state officials and wider public discourses.

### **Notions of the CSG as an Entitlement or as a Form of Charity**

During the numerous fieldwork occasions, the participants were asked how they understood the CSG with regard to entitlement or charity. Their responses were spread across the continuum, but a sense of a right to assistance, sometimes owing to the struggle for rights under apartheid, was more prevalent. Below I will describe some answers that fit into the two themes of charity and entitlement, but it is important to note that the participants' sometimes stated conflicting answers, where both of these sentiments could be gleaned.

#### *A Form of Charity*

During the interviews, several participants claimed that the grants are simply support from the government as a form of charity, as they are struggling now without employment. The same participants would often claim that what they saw as entitlements to state resources were, for instance, housing provided by the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), water, improved roads and access to jobs, but not necessarily social grants. Their responses to primarily the CSG (less so with regard to the old age pension and disability grant) as a form of charity to help struggling people, are summarised by Andile (one of my interpreters) who is a 40-year-old man: "It's help from the government. It's a gift. Because you can't just expect the government to help you raise your child."

Similar sentiments were offered by Zukiswa (a woman around 45 years of age) during an interview in 2017: "I just see it as a gift from the government. He is just supporting us since we are struggling." The use of "he" in this quote is referring to the government and the president, a not uncommon way of describing the government in this village. Zukiswa does, however, view other state services as entitlements that the government should provide, for example, RDP housing, water taps and better roads to the village. But, according to her, grants are not a right she can claim. Afterwards we talked more and Andile agreed with Zukiswa by saying: "Most people say the grant is their right, how can it be a right whilst you are the one who gave birth to the child. You then turn it around and make it a right that your child be maintained," upon which they chuckled. Although they both appreciate the CSG, they both subscribe to the idea that to feed one's family one should preferably work for one's income. However, they do voice other specific claims on the state with regard to subsidised housing, access to water and perhaps most commonly that the government should provide jobs to the unemployed.

Similarly, for Nombeko, who is a young woman in her 20s, living with her sister and their children, the grant is a form of compensation, rather than a right: "Actually, I cannot say if it is a right, I realised it's compensation that the government has given us but I don't think that it can be a person's right to receive the grant." Older people who

cannot work are the ones she considers to be most entitled to social grants. When asked what she would do if the grant stopped coming, she said: “I could be angry, but I don’t think that I will protest. Because I don’t know where SASSA gets this money.” Nombeko appreciates what the grant does for her and her household but does not regard it as an entitlement because, as she sees it, people of her age are supposed to work for their money; “it’s my right to work, not be compensated like the elderly.” This echoes what Barchiesi (2011) calls the “worker–citizen” nexus, the normative assumption of the centrality of wage labour and the notion of employment as the basis on which to claim entitlements, evident in South Africa.

### **Sense of Entitlement and Adverse Encounters With the State**

As mentioned, the sentiment that grants were some form of entitlement were more commonly expressed than the sentiment that they were purely a form of charity. The sense of entitlement was sometimes tied to arguments about having participated in the struggle against apartheid, as in the interview with Thembeke in 2017 during the SASSA crisis and the resulting uncertainties regarding grant payments:

Stefan: And would you complain to SASSA [if the grants were to stop coming]?

Thembeke: Oh my goodness, the whole country will protest. We will be asking for our grant.

Stefan: Even here in the village?

Thembeke: A lot, we will.

Stefan: So you see the grant as something that you have a right to?

Thembeke: Yes! It’s my right to receive it since we participated in the struggle. Mandela gave it to us. These are people’s rights.

When I revisited Thembeke in 2018, she expanded on her sense of entitlement and how she would feel if the grants were to stop coming:

I would not feel good since I would have been deprived of my right that I have become used to [. . .] we got used to it when we first had it actually. It’s us who will protest because men don’t know anything [about the grants].

Thembeke’s sense of entitlement stems from the historical injustices under apartheid and that their “suffering in a long and bitter independence struggle has earned them a reward” (Murray Li 2017, 1256). Molyneux, Jones and Samuels (2016) argue that protesting about the withdrawal of assistance or other action against the state is an indicator of a sense of entitlement to cash transfers, which is similar to Corbridge’s (2007) arguments regarding complaining about poor state services as a form of citizenship-making.

For the social grant beneficiaries in Cutwini, the CSG has become a marker of increased state involvement in supporting the livelihoods of rural villagers, although the participants sometimes experienced demeaning behaviour by state officials when applying for the grant. The grants have, however, become an established and entrenched part of everyday life in the village. This is evident primarily in younger people's sense of entitlement to state resources. Fundiswa, a woman in her late 30s, says: "I see it as a right. When I'm pregnant I know I will get the grant. There is no work and I'm not ploughing [not engaged in agriculture]." The younger generation in general express a sense of entitlement and are also more aware of the constitutional right to social security, although older people also share the same sentiments. Social grants are now undoubtedly an everyday part of life in the village, a norm, and this contributes to an emerging sense of entitlement, which elements of Thembeke's and Fundiwa's statements point to. They expect the grants to be delivered in a timely and uninterrupted way. Furthermore, as was evident during observations of the paydays in 2016 when the service delivery of social grants to the village were still running smoothly, neither "expressions of gratitude nor praise poems to the benevolent state" were prominent (Ferguson 2015, 179). Instead, the delivery of social grants, which for many households in the village are their primary income, was simply seen as the normal state of affairs.

It was not always the normal state of affairs. Nomteto, who is in her 40s, an unemployed widow looking after her five school-age children on her own, says: "We grew up not receiving the grant [. . .] nowadays government have taken ownership of every child, that's a good thing." Nomteto's view indicates seeing a "caring state" that takes responsibility and ownership of the children's upbringing. It represents a positive relation to the state and a form of recognition of their social citizenship. This positive relation, however, does not necessarily entail gratitude towards the state, as Nomteto claims that she would complain to SASSA in town should the grant stop coming: "Yoh, we can go and complain . . . yes, what will we do with these children, isn't it they attend school? How would we buy their uniforms? [Others in the village as well] they would complain [to SASSA] until the sun sets." The views of CSG recipients such as Nomteto, who have to provide for several children and who face few if any employment opportunities, suggest that there is a form of contract with the state starting to form. The view she expresses is that if it is important that the children are given schooling, as the state obviously believes that it is, then the state should also take part of the responsibility for making sure this is possible to do. These kinds of view are shared among several participants in this study.

From the interviews, there is a clear sense that implementing the social grant system has improved from the early days (in the early 2000s) of CSG implementation in the region (Seekings 2015). All of the participants claim that it is much easier to apply for the grant today and there is not as much waiting for the administrative processing of the CSG as before. Introducing cash dispenser trucks using pin codes was also seen by primarily the pensioners as a much-improved situation, compared to having to travel long distances into town to collect social grants. The recent problems in South Africa with

social grant payments, such as illegal deductions and predatory and immoral loan arrangements (Torkelson 2020; Vally 2016) on recipients' cards, were not proclaimed to be a major problem during the household survey phase in this rural village (2016) but some had experienced money going missing when they collected their grants.

However, as mentioned, in 2018 there were new developments with the service delivery of social grants. Between 2018 and 2019, South African newspapers reported on technical glitches and long queues outside post offices, pay points in shops or at various ATMs (with frustrated comments from pensioners such as “we will die standing in this queue” (Damba-Hendrik et al. 2018)). This was the case in Lusikisiki during the November 2018 paydays. Dumisa (around 45 years old), who is used to travelling to Lusikisiki on paydays to collect her grants and to buy food in bulk, expressed her anger and frustration with this particular payday. She had left the house at 07:00 without having eaten anything. By late afternoon (18:00), she was still queuing to collect her two CSGs. There were many people (approximately 200) waiting inside the Boxer superstore (a low-price supermarket chain). It became an entire day of waiting as the new system forced everyone to travel to town to collect their social grants meaning that cash ran out at this supermarket owing to the additional customers collecting grants. They had to wait for more money to be brought from the bigger city of Mthatha, roughly two hours away by road. Dumisa spoke of frustrations and expressions of entitlements to their grant among the people who queued: “They said they are not leaving without their money [. . .] some people don't have [other] people they can depend on.” Regarding the possibility that failure might occur to distribute the grants or if grants were to cease, Dumisa said: “They can protest, we can protest. We will go straight to the SASSA offices.” The crisis of not knowing whether the grants would be delivered or not created a sense of uncertainty and insecurity which resulted in a decrease in trust towards SASSA or other state agencies. Whereas, during the fieldwork in 2016, the service delivery of social grants was effective and payday was a day of joy and festive atmosphere in Cutwini (Granlund and Hochfeld 2020), which reinforced a sense of being seen by the state, a positive encounter with the state.

Yet, it is not just the extra costs of travel and the long wait causing uncertainty regarding their main source of income that the participants mention as being problematic. Thembi, in her early 30s, describes her negative experiences with the state officials at the SASSA offices in Lusikisiki, to which caregivers have to apply for grants:

They insult us as grant recipients [. . .] People at the [local SASSA office] say we fall pregnant for this money [. . .] [But], I don't care about that. [laughter]. We have become used to it [the insults]. We don't even care anymore. I know that at the end of the day, I will get the money, then I will do the things that I couldn't do before, so I don't even care about them now. [laughter] They are not going to do anything to me, this money is not theirs. How can they not give me it, I have all the documents, so they are supposed to give me that money. I have a right to get that money.

Thembi is not alone in this study in experiencing insults and mistreatment and referring to derogatory terms such as *imali yeqolo* from SASSA state officials. Her experience with claiming the grant shows that although social grants are a right under the Constitution, the actual implementation by the local SASSA office in the treatment she receives may leave applicants feeling unjustly accused of trying to cheat the system. This represents a strong form of misrecognition, where applicants are deemed unworthy of respect and esteem and cast as irresponsible scroungers (Fraser 2000). This corroborates recent research on the dignity of social grant recipients and their encounters with state officials or public opinions of CSG recipients (Hochfeld and Plagerson 2011; Wright et al. 2015). Although the stigmatisation affected Thembi's dignity in encounters with the state, she was adamant that it did not affect her sense of right to claim her money. Leaning on the constitutional right to the CSG as a claims-based entitlement is here a powerful tool for women such as Thembi, navigating disrespectful state officials and public views.

Nombeko had similar experiences. During repeated visits with Nombeko in 2017–2018, she told of her frustration of being treated differently by others in the community or from state officials because she had the CSG:

I don't have a problem with earning the grant, but it is the way other people see, look at us, the people who have grants [. . .] it's as if they undermine us . . . they look at us as if we are people who are useless because we don't work to earn the grant.

The stigma of working-age people receiving welfare grants without a job is consistent with the moral standing that waged work has in South Africa and, indeed, around the world (Barchiesi 2011; Roelen 2019). The stigma younger CSG recipients such as Nombeko and Thembi experience from surrounding society and SASSA officials is a powerful form of misrecognition which affects their dignity. It implies that they are undeserving of their CSGs as they do not work for it. Their socially reproductive care work of raising a child generally goes unacknowledged as a contribution in society (Ulriksen and Plagerson 2014). Nombeko and Thembi's experiences illuminates the widespread problem of stigma in South Africa in relation to grants (Hochfeld and Plagerson 2011). Nevertheless, several participants claimed the stigma of receiving the CSG has lessened at least in this village nowadays, perhaps because most households have social grants. The grants have slowly become an accepted normal part of the local village life as the grants are now the primary income for many households in the village and the social grants are more and more growing in importance owing to the jobless deagrarianisation in the rural Eastern Cape (Granlund and Hochfeld 2020; Hajdu et al. 2020; Hajdu, Neves, and Granlund 2020).

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, I explored the lived experiences of encounters with the state through social grants service delivery (SASSA government officials) and CSG recipients' sense

of entitlements (or lack thereof) to social grants in the rural Eastern Cape. I argue that the impoverished villagers in the rural Eastern Cape collecting their social grants are neither expressing the more radical views expressed by Ferguson (2015) of having a rightful share to state resources nor behaving like Auyero's (2011) docile "patients of state". My interviews and the ethnographic snapshots presented above show a more complex situation where both views of charity with regard to social grants exist simultaneously with steadfast expressions of entitlement. Compliance and patient queuing (Auyero 2011) exist together with loud complaints. The actions and views expressed point to the contentious character of social grants in rural South Africa today, where forms of recognition of CSG recipients as citizens and misrecognition are both present, in the public discourse and in rural state-citizen encounters. The participants in this study experience a state that takes "ownership" of the children, as Nomteto says, and indirectly redistributes resources that sustain entire households. Drawing on Fraser, these are forms of recognition, which strengthen the participants' ability to participate as peers in social life and strengthen a sense of citizenship and social inclusion. Simultaneously, however, many participants are also forced to endure insults and mistreatment from state officials as the case of Thembi shows, and must sometimes deal with a long and arduous wait for their grants. These forms of misrecognition affect recipients' dignity and well-being and reveal the complex state-citizen relations in present-day South Africa.

When large-scale welfare programmes such as the South African social grants system are introduced as a constitutionally protected entitlement, they are difficult to later abolish, as public expectations of provision of state social security are strong (Murray Li 2009). This is visible in the massive attention the SASSA crisis generated from civil society and the media and the sentiments of most of the research participants. The field work over these years, 2016–2018, unveil the way in which the social grants have become an accepted and established pillar of village life, affecting both material livelihoods (Hajdu et al. 2020) and social relations (Granlund and Hochfeld 2020). Access to social grants (applying for and collecting the money) has improved since the CSG was introduced in 2002 (Seekings 2015), also according to the participants. Therefore, empirically studying the local reactions to the changes that took place during the SASSA crisis in 2017 and the transition to a new service provider in 2018 was useful to shine a light on what seems to be a growing sense of entitlement to social grants.

However, this process towards people becoming claimants on the state that successfully exercise leverage to improve their lives under conditions of mass unemployment and jobless growth cannot be said to be a linear process. As Murray Li (2017) notes, politics of distribution towards significant pro-poor gains need to be fought for. In South Africa, the expectations and demands by the participants on the state as a guarantor of not only civil and political rights, but also social rights (Plagerson, Harpham, and Kielmann 2012), are evident in this research.



As the participants in this study note, applying for social grants and access to these grants have improved greatly since the early 2000s, when the CSG was introduced in these parts of the Eastern Cape. Nevertheless, South Africa's previous problems of a malfunctioning bureaucracy (Breckenridge 2005) that was supposed to be repaired by improved technology (including reducing the risk of fraud) have recently seen much criticism as well (Torkelson 2017; Vally 2016). The South African civil society organisation, the Black Sash, has pointed out that the 2012 change in payment to biometric cards (authentication using fingerprints) has enabled a private provider (CPS) to introduce unauthorised deductions and problematic financial loan services from beneficiary accounts, which can lead to a spiralling of debt (Torkelson 2020). Owing to new technologies for grant payments, new dangers have therefore also emerged. Du Toit (2017, 1473) argues that the massive undertaking by the state of supplying a large part of the population monthly with social grants, which was intended to turn abstract entitlements of citizenship into concrete reality, instead turned people into debtor beneficiaries. It remains to be seen if the transition to the Post Office and new SASSA cards can quell the problems of debt and deductions (Torkelson 2020).

Ferguson's (2015) reading of southern Africa with regard to citizens having a rightful share to state resources is still optimistic for South Africa in the sense that there is quite a way to go before such sentiments could be realised. The participants, however, did not simply see the grants as help for the needy (as something charitable) either. The views of Thembeke, Dumisa, Thembi, Fundiswa and other participants in this study comes close to what Ferguson (2015) expresses, and although they do not express it because of having "rightful shares", their steadfast sense of entitlement to social grants is evident.

In contrast to Auyero's (2011) notion of "patients of the state", Oldfield and Greyling (2015) claim that the impoverished people in South Africa waiting for state housing are not "submissive patients", but neither are they in open resistance towards the state. I argue that the same applies to many rural recipients waiting in queues for social grants. People are together claiming something from the state, and if that claim is not met, chaos threatens – which can be glimpsed when Dumisa says "they are not leaving without their money." Masses of people each month therefore enact a form of agency by standing in line and waiting. To be sure, it is also sometimes a rather agonising and stigmatising wait, producing a form of misrecognition that affects recipients' dignity. However, from this vantage point, waiting for the state could also be seen as a potent form of activity, one that cannot be said to produce passive and docile welfare "patients of the state". Waiting in line – queuing – can also be a way of relating to the state, pressuring the state, being seen by and seeing the state, i.e. acquiring a sense of recognition.

As Kabeer, Sudarshan and Milward (2013) note, the struggle for social security is also a struggle to gain recognition of the status as citizens. Waiting for the state "includes waiting for recognition as full and meaningful citizens" (Carswell, Chambers, and

De Neve 2019, 613). Similar to the Indian participants in the study by Carswell, Chambers and De Neve (2019), the participants in this study become not “patients of the state” but rather actors seeking to mobilise whatever resources are available to them, which includes engaging with a contested but vital relation with the state.

In 2019, we claimed that cash transfers would play an even greater role in times of jobless deagrarianisation and absence of decent waged work (Granlund and Hochfeld 2020). The devastating consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the much-needed and welcomed roll-out of (albeit temporary) social grants to more than just pensioners and caretakers of children in South Africa merely cements that claim.

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