AIDS, metaphor and ritual: The crafting of care in rural South African childhoods

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Abstract
Based on a two-year study of 31 young people aged 14–20 who had lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS, in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, the article draws on an in-depth ethnographic account of a 17-year-old girl's life process. It traces forms of care between adults and children within her family across several generations, exploring how social repertoires and forms of ritual pre-dating the HIV/AIDS epidemic are brought to bear on relationships compromised through death, dispersal and disappearance. Temporalities in relation to loss, the reconfiguration of the past and of imagined possible futures emerge from the account.

Keywords
Care, children, HIV/AIDS, ritual, South Africa, temporality

This article considers one aspect of children and young people's attempts to actively augment sociality compromised through HIV/AIDS in a small rural settlement in South Africa. Placing considerations of children's contemporary lives within a context of generational experiences of death, and the changeability of social relationships of care, shows that although the scale of attrition is unquestionably amplified within the widescale presence of HIV/AIDS (and within a predominant neoliberal world order in which employment possibilities for unskilled people have diminished) methods of dealing with change demonstrate forms of continuity, drawing on local repertoires to re-stitch threads of sociality. That these attempts are uneven, at times inadequate and often painful is not in question. In South Africa, where HIV prevalence rates are highest in the sub-Saharan region and indeed the world, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that approximately 1,400,000 children have lost one or both parents through death to the disease (UNICEF, 2006: 3). The exigencies of HIV/AIDS come to profoundly augment and exacerbate other forms of separation, severance and loss – those, for example,

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accompanying the necessity of migration in sustaining livelihoods that have emerged during the course of South Africa's fraught history and that were entrenched in apartheid law (Marks, 2000; Smit, 1998; West, 1984).

Location and methods

Ethnographic research on which this article is based took place from 2003 to 2005 in the settlement of Emfuleni, Okhahlamba – a sub-district in the highest mountain reaches of KwaZulu-Natal. It straddled a period in which antiretroviral treatments were initially unobtainable for the majority of people, becoming available during the course of 2005, through the public health system. Thirty-one children and young people (17 girls and 14 boys), aged 14–20, participated in the study, all of whom had lost one or both parents, mostly to AIDS.

Data were collected through participant observation at bi-weekly meetings with the group at their school after school hours; ongoing visits to individuals' homesteads; formal and separate interviews with each young person and his or her guardian; focus group discussions around general themes emerging from interviews; and the use of drama techniques in facilitating young people's perceptions of the region in which they lived. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from both the children and their guardians in ongoing verbal and written ways.

Literature review

Emphasis has increasingly been placed on the importance of child-centred studies to avoid a rendition of children's lives reflected through their appropriation by adults (James and Prout, 1990; Reynolds et al., 2006; Tisdall et al., 2009). Yet adults are invariably involved with children in relation to forms of care (Christensen and James, 2009: 2). In this article, I draw both on the life story of a guardian and of a 17-year-old girl. I have elsewhere outlined the details of the young people's everyday lives and the differing circumstances in which they lived (Henderson, 2006, 2011a).

Having noted a paucity of global responses to children living in a context of HIV/AIDS, UNICEF launched the 2005 campaign, Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS (see UNICEF, 2006). Subsequently, an increasingly large body of literature emerged, characterizing the figure of the child in the context of HIV/AIDS as the most vulnerable category of persons (see, for example, Bellamy, 2004; Richter et al., 2006; Tarantola and Gruskin, 1998). The notion of vulnerability attaching itself to children living with and alongside HIV/AIDS has mainly been preoccupied with socioeconomic and psychosocial consequences for children (Cluver and Gardner, 2006, 2007; Earls et al., 2008; Murray, 2010; UNAIDS, 2009; UNICEF, 2006). There is little literature that portrays the experience of orphanhood.

Out of a naturalization of specific forms of vulnerability, globalized policy and intervention discourses have created the terms 'AIDS orphan' and 'orphans and vulnerable children' that capture a sense of quintessential vulnerability in relation to 'the African child at risk', itself a totalizing idea. In South Africa, these terms have been specifically questioned in a small body of anthropological literature (Bray, 2004; Giese et al., 2003; Henderson, 2006; Meintjes and Giese, 2006).

The above terms, having become common currency in global policy and development work, have created particular kinds of intervention that match their conceptual load (Marshak, 2010). In my own work, I show how flattening notions of vulnerability obscure the 'strength and dexterity' children bring to bear on their experience of adversity (Henderson, 1999; 2006: 303). As Reynolds et al. (2006: 292) point out, in exploring localized non-governmental organizational (NGO) use of the globalized idiom of children's rights, universalizing rhetoric is often abstracted from priorities children set for themselves, and the political dimensions of poverty in which they may live. The above terms also fail to recognize long-established local patterns of care that transcend their narrow encapsulation within the parameters of an imagined nuclear family, dependent on the passing of care from biological parents to their children.

'Domestic fluidity' and households 'stretched across space', straddling both rural and urban environments (Meintjes and Hall, 2009: 99; Spiegel, 1995; Spiegel and Mehlwana, 1997; Spiegel et al., 1996: 7), have long been a feature of South African life (see also Ansell and Van Blerk, 2004; Ansell and Young, 2004; Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen, 2003 and Young and Ansell, 2003, for literature in relation to Southern Africa more generally, concerning the migration of children in the context of AIDS). With kinship networks extending across different geographical locations, it is not uncommon for children to live apart from their biological parents, and particularly their fathers, for varying lengths of time. Several writers have noted the reality of multiple caregivers within the unfolding lives of children (Henderson, 1999, 2003; Meintjes and Hall, 2009; Ross, 2010). Monash and Boerma (2004: 57), in a study of childcare patterns and orphanhood across 40 sub-Saharan African countries, found that children were least likely to live with their parents in Southern Africa and that a quarter of non-orphaned children in South Africa lived apart from both biological parents. Although the number of orphans in South Africa has dramatically increased as a consequence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Meintjes and Hall, 2009: 100), patterns of childcare, although overburdened, persist, continuing to absorb orphans on a large scale (Monash and Boerma, 2004: 65; see also Ansell and Van Blerk, 2004: 679–680).

Returning to Emfuleni, the locus of care within and beyond families moved between people in complex ways. Care was not a one-way process of nurture and support proffered by adults to children, with children positioned as passive recipients. Rather care circulated between generations with mutual responsibilities. Ansell and Van Blerk (2004: 677) capture a similar idea in relation to children's migration, in the context of AIDS-related deaths in Malawi and Lesotho, by showing how both children's needs and their contribution to the viability of households are taken into account in their accommodation within extended family households. In Emfuleni, just as adults were expected to provide for children and to teach young people ways-of-being and forms of practical knowledge within the environment in which they lived, children performed many tasks for their families and neighbours in relation to the maintenance of homesteads, without which rural lives would have been untenable.

In the most extreme inversion of social roles, and with a paring away of possibilities for remunerated employment, families often relied for material support on the youngest children within them, in whose names various state grants were obtainable.[1] Girl children sometimes removed themselves from school in order to care for dying parents. On a ritual level, children often stood in for adults who had died, assisting in ceremonies that reinscribed a sense of liveable sociality, however tenuous. To give an illustrative example, a

grandmother described to me how her granddaughter had planned to marry a lover, but due to HIV/AIDS both had died before being able to complete their marriage. Relatives planned to enact the marriage in the names of the deceased, to complete what they had wished for in life, and to cement the relationships and obligations between their two families. In doing so, the ceremony was held with a young boy standing for the groom, and a grandmother for the bride. In a similar appropriation, children who had lost their parents through death were often perceived by their grandparents as 'standing in' for their deceased children. The value of intergenerational reciprocity was acknowledged and constituted an important part of life and of personhood. The substitutability of persons within ritual and in forms of life, to a degree provided a means of suturing social wounds.

Deceased parents were tangibly incorporated into the living world through the construction of spirit houses for the dead, houses that accompanied their inauguration as ancestral shades with responsibilities to the living. Such houses were fully furnished. The ritual mechanism of people standing in by proxy for the deceased enabled the emergence of a particular form of temporality in which attempts were made to repair the shortcomings of the past in the present. The untimeliness of sequences of events, in which death interrupted life and in which rituals could not be staged at times that seemed most appropriate, or did not always have immediately desired effects, created a more jagged temporality in which loss, irony, mourning and despair provided a counterpoint to efforts at repair.

Despite attempts at re-stitching the threads of sociality, the affective loss of particular individuals erupted into the everyday – at a funeral, for example, with the uncompromising wail of a daughter, marking her unbounded grief at her mother's death. Pain also revealed itself in conversation when usually measured forms of expression were punctuated by exclamations and metaphoric references to the overwhelming presence of death.

With regard to losses experienced by children and young people, I never felt it ethical for me to approach these too directly. I preferred the children themselves to determine the pace and content of our conversations. (For a more sustained consideration of the latter approach to research within a context of death and dying, see Henderson, 2005.) In general, the young people were reluctant to speak of loss. It was in rare, private moments that their personal pain became visible, in quiet tears, for example. In the play the group created, they could refer directly to loss through death and to the presence of HIV/AIDS – something not ordinarily done in everyday life. Improvised and enacted roles allowed them to foreground difficulties without approaching, too closely, their personal distress (Henderson, 2011b). Marshak (2010) has written effectively of the way in which children shared some of their grief around the deaths of their parents through letter writing, a self-initiated form of address in which the writer did not face the addressee or researcher directly, but waited for a reply that ensured a seemly privacy, and yet an openness, often not possible in public or within groups of young people.

I now turn to the story of one young woman, Ntombikhayise,[2] and her family, in order to give substance to some of the themes mentioned above.

Ntombikhayise and her family

When I first met Ntombikhayise in 2003, she was 17, and lived with a 15-year-old brother, Siphiwe, and Mandla, her mother's sister's young son in the homestead of their

maternal grandmother. When Ntombikhayise was six years old and Siphiwe four, their mother entered into marriage negotiations. Her children did not accompany her in the marriage, as was often the case in patrilineal family structures, where children born before marriage were said to belong to a mother's family. Ntombikhayise and Siphiwe went to live with their maternal grandmother at Emfuleni.

In Ntombikhayise's words, 'My grandmother has been responsible for me right up until my completing high-school. I became my grandmother's child. I grew up under her' (Interview: 21 May 2004). Siphiwe, in giving an account of his life and describing how his father had died when he was very young, said:

> Yes, I stay with my grandmother. My mother got married and left us when we were young. My grandmother has treated us well, right up until today, when, as you see, we have grown up. We are as we are now because she is still treating us nicely. Yes, I have not seen anything bad. The only thing is that when I am old I want to be able to look after the parents of the home and the children of the home. (Interview: 7 April 2004)

Siphiwe's last sentence draws attention to his acknowledgement of the difficulties of living in poverty, but suggests that this had not affected his experience of the quality of care offered by his grandmother. Ntombikhayise and Siphiwe's words must be considered within a context in which the movement of care from a mother to a grandmother was not an unusual occurrence, pre-dating and existing alongside the HIV/AIDS epidemic, through the long-established necessity of migration on the part of parents looking for work. Parents living in different places from their children did not mean that they no longer took an interest in them, or ceased to offer support. Reynolds (1984), for example, has shown in one study how fathers separated from their children nevertheless strove to uphold the ideals of fatherhood. More recently in South Africa, the physical 'absence of fathers in the [everyday] domestic lives of African children' has been reiterated (Meintjes and Hall, 2009: 100). Such separations create forms of what I call 'absent presence' in the lives of children, in which absent parents remain of great importance at times, through their efforts elsewhere in sustaining rural homes, and after their deaths in various symbolic accommodations of the dead within children's homes.

The young people's words, however, point to the ways in which the quality of care expected of a mother could issue from another, indicating a social process through which a grandmother in some senses could 'become a mother' through taking on day-to-day care of a child. Yet as Cebsile – one of the young people who had nursed both parents before their deaths – remarked, it was extremely painful when she heard other people referring to their mothers, when she herself could no longer call anyone by that name.

The aesthetics of constructing marriage relationships in the face of death

Returning to Ntombikhayise's story, a few days after receiving her matriculation certificate in early 2004, she stayed overnight at her boyfriend's homestead. A mediator was sent to Ntombikhayise's grandmother's house to 'shout from the fields', to begin marriage negotiations between the two families.

It was the anticipation of the elaborate and enjoyable gift exchanges, rituals and parties between her grandmother's and the groom's homes that were spoken of with excitement and pride by Ntombikhayise, and that underscored the ways in which attempts at securing affinal relationships through social occasions, marking steps towards marriage, held deep aesthetic pleasures for those involved. These enacted proceedings held up a template through which people attempted to re-forge forms of sociality that looked to the future, but that were deeply imbricated with repertoires that had some continuity with the past. I set out here some of Ntombikhayise's remarks concerning her 'elopement', so as to place them alongside the attrition through multiple deaths that her family had experienced. These included the deaths of her parents, of her grandmother's husband, remaining children and son-in-law. She said:

> We will hold a function [called] *itshali* (shawl). People from my *umkwenyana's* (groom's) side will buy [for me] two dresses, two pinafores, two petticoats, two umbrellas, a pair of shoes and something to show respect (to cover the head to show respect to the bridegroom's family). From the bride's side they also buy. My grandmother will buy for my *umkwenyana,* and he too will do the same. She will buy for the bridegroom and his friend. She will buy plates, food dishes and washing dishes. *All his parents* (my emphasis) will be respected. They will be given clothes that they can wear when the people from the bride's side are present. They too will do something to pay respect to the bride's grandmother. When this has happened, they will bring me back to my grandmother's house. People from around my home will support my grandmother and they will cook. It means my grandmother will put a feather on the bridegroom, showing that she accepts him. She will slaughter a goat. It becomes enjoyable. People will sing and dance . . .
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> When we come to my grandmother's house, people will ask for the song of the bride, and the bridegroom will dance and his people also. Then girls from this side will dance. The leaders (*amagosa*) will say that there is no girl that has come as a spectator. They will punish those who do not dance. It is enjoyable when there are many people. . . . The ways of isiZulu are very interesting. . . . People buy many things, and they are not cheap. It requires that one understands them. . . . You know, there were six girls from our area who got engaged at about the same time, and the people praised us. . . . It is in the houses belonging to *amaqaba* (traditionalists) that you really learn what it is to be a bride! (Interview: Ntombikhayise 21 May 2004)

Staging an abduction of a girl, or her staying overnight in a boyfriend's homestead, precipitated negotiations between families, where the boy's family did not have sufficient means to pay bridewealth in the initial stages of marriage. I have elsewhere described how five out of the 17 girls involved in the study contracted 'informal' marriages with their boyfriends, in which they took on the duties of young brides in their new homes without bridewealth having been given (Henderson, 2012). As Ntombikhayise's grandmother said, in the series of gift exchanges, dance parties and ceremonies in which particular forms of clothing marked Ntombikhayise and her groom's new status, she would wait to see when and whether any cattle were given for her granddaughter. This type of relationship left open the possibility that bridewealth would be paid in the future. In reality, processes towards a fully achieved marriage were often incomplete, even for Ntombikhayise's mother and grandmother's generations. I have argued that this form of 'elopement' was one means through which, in the face of many deaths within their families due to HIV/AIDS, girls could expand the number of people on whom they could

legitimately call for support in sustaining their lives (see also Ansell and Van Blerk, 2004: 688 for reference to a similar strategy in Malawi).

Losses within a mother's generation

I now turn to a broader description of Ntombikhayise's family, the assistance they proffered one another, and the diminution of their family through death. Ntombikhayise's grandmother was disappointed that both her daughters had given birth to children before beginning formally recognized relationships with men. She used the word *mithela* to describe her grandchildren's births, a word usually used for animal as opposed to human births. The choice of word underscored her sense that her daughters had behaved in ways contrary to a certain ideal of 'ordered' human life. After her marriage, Ntombikhayise and Siphiwe's mother visited them from time to time. In 2001, after she had spent 10 years working in Johannesburg, she visited her mother and children over Christmas, where it became clear that 'death was eating her' ('*ukufa kuyamudla*'). Ntombikhayise's grandmother, in describing how her daughter died, punctuated her words with phrases that held a palpable sense of pain. After telling me that she could see her daughter was dying, she exclaimed, 'Oh, there is departure!' ('*Awu, kuyahanjiwa!*') – a reference to the overwhelming presence of death and dying at the time of our conversation, three years after her daughter's death, that bore a submerged acknowledgement of the presence of HIV/AIDS, and the way in which mourning for the deaths of all three of her children was amplified and reiterated through ongoing deaths in the present.

In visiting the guardians, children and young people, a range of metaphors were used to refer to death. These included the idea of children having left, as in, 'Oh, they have left us!' ('*Hayi, basishiye!*'), and of having been shattered like a clay pot, as in 'Mother of Siboniseni has been broken' ('*MakaSiboniseni uphugile*'), and of having been eaten by the earth, as in 'Oh my child was beautiful! The earth has eaten her!' ('*Umhlaba uyahla!*')

Although Ntombikhayise and Siphiwe's father was still alive when their mother died in 2001, by the time Ntombikhayise eloped, her father had also died in a most shocking way. Having returned one weekend from the district town in which he worked to his father's homestead, the dwelling in which he slept was struck by lightning. As her grandmother described his death, 'The family found him dead behind the door like a crumpled parcel. He had become a pile of ash' (Interview: 17 May 2004). In describing her own life, Ntombikhayise's grandmother marked significant losses. These had to do not only with Ntombikhayise's mother's death, but with the deaths of her two remaining children, including Mandla's mother from HIV/AIDS.

The loss of the grandmother's children was compounded by the fact that her marriage had been one in name only, as her husband, after leaving to find work in Johannesburg, 'disappeared' for 14 years. She noted with bitter irony that it was only after his death that he returned home, a corpse. In her words, he had 'thrown [her] away' only to return home once 'he was quiet (*esethuli*)'. She said their marriage remained incomplete, because although bridewealth had been paid, there had not been enough money for *umabo*, the exchange of other gifts from her family to the groom's family.

During the years that her husband was away in Johannesburg, Ntombikhayise and Siphiwe's grandmother supported herself, her children and her grandchildren by

sewing pinafores, the ubiquitous everyday dress of married women. She had also, as she expressed it, 'strengthened the fence!' ('*qinisile ucingo*!'), meaning that she took on lovers who assisted her sometimes with her expenses. Before her marriage and death, Ntombikhayise's mother contributed to the family financially through working in a local community store. It was she who paid for the return and burial of her father's body, and partly for the elaborate cleansing rituals required after death, including the removal of her mother's mourning clothes. Although it was with a degree of bitterness that Ntombikhayise's grandmother donned mourning clothes for a man who had been absent in life, she went through the cleansing rituals for him, slaughtering a beast to inaugurate him as an ancestral shade, who in death would care for the homestead, because as she said, she had eloped with him, and so was obligated to bury him (Interview: 17 May 2004). It was in this spectral sense that Ntombikhayise's grandfather took on a more important role in death for her family than he had in life.

Ntombikhayise's grandmother's account provides a poignant example of the absent presence of certain individuals within rural homesteads, and their conversion into a symbolic form of posthumous solidity.

After Mandla's mother's death in 2003, Ntombikhayise's grandmother tried to access monies from both his deceased parents' savings, his father also having died. His parents had not stipulated beneficiaries in the event of their deaths, and so she was unable to do so, despite her appeal for help to the police, Mandla's uncle and a municipal counsellor. She therefore completed the necessary paperwork for a foster-grant application, and a social worker promised to fetch her when the case was taken to court – something she failed to do. There being only one social worker to service the entire population of 150,000 people in Okhahlamba (personal communication, Child Welfare, Ladysmith), it was not surprising that very few people managed to secure foster-grants for the children under their care. Ntombikhayise's grandmother therefore tried to accrue a little more money by offering to look after an unrelated child, whose mother worked in one of the mountain resort hotels. She did this for a fee, but payments were irregular. Ntombikhayise's grandmother found it difficult to ask the baby's mother for money, who sometimes gave her relish (*isishebo*) or vegetables. She could not register the child for the more easily obtainable Child Support Grant either, because he was without the required documentation to apply for such a grant.

A grandmother's childhood

Ntombikhayise's grandmother had experienced difficulties in her own childhood, her father dying before she could sit up. She, her mother and older sister had survived through making and selling grass mats. These were widely used in gift exchanges for weddings and in burying the dead. In their gifting, they were symbolic of the conduits of care women and girls attempted to forge in rural areas (see Henderson, 2011a: 144–150). Ntombikhayise's grandmother's sister eloped when she was 16. Soon Ntombikhayise's grandmother went to live with her sister, as her mother could no longer support her. She then too eloped, and as I have already described, began a relationship with her children's father characterized by absence and a lack of material support.

Conflicting loyalties of care and the living standing in by proxy for the dead

Returning to Ntombikhayise's elopement in 2004, her grandmother paid for the blankets required to 'respect' her in-laws, using her pension money. She also formed a blanket *stokvel* or savings club with women in her area. Ntombikhayise's father's mother contributed two blankets, two enamel dishes and a big tea-pot towards gifts for Ntombikhayise's groom's family. As Ntombikhayise's grandmother described it, 'Getting married is a long process. It is extremely difficult, but it is nice.' She hoped that Ntombikhayise's in-laws would allow her to take on casual work (*amatoho*) to help pay for some of the expense – not a wish usually granted, where young brides were expected to do all the heavy work in their in-laws' homesteads. Her young groom worked as a casual labourer on white-owned farms in the region. In her view, his prospects were not ideal, or in her own words, 'his way [was] not clear'.

Ntombikhayise's grandmother, when asked what was important about the three grandchildren whom she had come to care for prior to and after their parents' deaths, said:

> No, it was not a mistake to stay with them. I liked it. I am thankful for it in the end, although it was painful when their mothers gave birth to them. It was shameful. Oh, my children gave birth at home! (*Hawu ezami ezingane zamithela ekhaya*!) And one did it again. But now I am thankful to God for bringing these children. It shows that he knew that one day my children would leave me and I would be left with these children now alone. (Interview: 17 May 2004)

Although Ntombikhayise had promised to look after her grandmother in her old age, she had eloped. Her grandmother said:

> While Ntombikhayise was at school she used to promise me that she would not marry. She also said that after she finished school she would not marry because she did not want me, her *gogo* (granny), to wear old clothes (*izingubo engacacile*, literally clothes that are not clear). The only thing she wanted to do was to work and to build a big house for me. But what happened? Ntombikhayise got her Standard Ten results on a Tuesday and on that Friday she disappeared. She eloped (*wayogana*). (Interview: May 2004)

Analysis

Ntombikhayise's life and those of her mother and grandmother contained multidimensional forms of social attrition caused by various kinds of death, including those due to HIV/AIDS, as well as by migration, abandonment, poverty and the exigencies of inflexible state bureaucratic protocols that were sometimes impossible to master, because of lives lived with the necessity of separation and movement, and across dispersed networks of relationship. Ntombikhayise's story provides an example of how care moved between caregivers as a consequence of death, but also with the initiation of steps towards marriage. Ntombikhayise, her mother and grandmother had all eloped, something that necessarily shifted and expanded patterns of care. Just as Ntombikhayise's great grandmother had struggled to support her two daughters after her husband's death, so too had her grandmother in supporting her grandchildren in a time of AIDS, where all her own

children had succumbed to the disease. Yet she had taken on the responsibility for her grandchildren's care prior to their mothers' deaths when they had contracted formally recognized relationships with men and their families.

The varying circumstances of the other young people in the study

By way of comparison with the life of Ntombikhayise, few of the young people lived with paternal kin (25%) and only two with fathers; 51% of the children and young people lived with maternal kin; 24% of the group, or six young people, lived in what seemed to be child-headed households, yet in all but one household, the children had extensive interaction with relatives, including grandparents, uncles and aunts who lived in close proximity to them, in some cases in adjoining homesteads.

Although statistical generalizations cannot be made from such a small group of young people and their guardians, the proportion of young people supported by their mothers, and generally by maternal kin, remains striking in a context where patrilineal kin are deemed to be of such ideological importance. This suggests the instability of women's relationships with men and the increasing financial difficulty in completing formal marriages, given the reduction of employment possibilities for male migrants. It is striking that care of the young remains in the hands of women, and particularly of grandmothers, who are often the poorest members of South African society.

Conclusion

Ngwane (2003) and White (2001) have respectively explored aspects of temporality in the construction of the notion of home and of senses-of-self, in relation to returning male migrants, on the one hand, and an unemployed youth unable to fulfil social expectations that he become a provider, on the other. The particular stringencies of sustaining rural homesteads and indeed the philosophical notion of home and place are given poignancy, through placing their analyses firmly within an understanding of the effects of a neoliberal world order, where monetary policies and structural adjustment programmes have radically reduced employment possibilities for many migrants, and have undercut the capacity of poor families to sustain themselves with any consistency.

Ngwane explores the spectral sense of rural homesteads that are ironically sustained through the absence of their male 'heads' and through examining the performative aspects of a period of largesse and abundance during the Christmas holidays in which coherence is enacted and through which a spectral sense of home emerges. White shows the unhomeliness of home in which rituals brought to bear on a young man's life to secure employment no longer have the desired effect over time and lead to a sense of alienation from everyday life, and from philosophical and ritual possibilities in which appeals and gifts to ancestral shades hold out the promise of repair.

Whereas the above authors deal with notions of temporarily from the points of view of men, young men and migrants, my work has explored ritual repertoires brought to bear on worlds eroded through the presence of HIV/AIDS, largely from the point of view

of girls and women. Women and girls have come to anchor notions of the rural home, largely through protracted rituals of affinity, courtship and marriage, and in mourning rituals around death and the inauguration of the deceased as ancestral shades.

In relation to forms of care in Emfuleni, instead of care being held consistently by individuals, it is shared or passed on to others. In a context of scarcity and dispersal, there may be conflicting claims to care, as we have seen in Ntombikhayise's story. The passing on of care from one to another is also not necessarily smooth. A person in a position of responsibility in relation to care may abandon his or her commitments, leaving social threads to be picked up by those who remain, however reluctantly.

Care, therefore, may be thought of as malleable, mobile and migratory in echoing people's lived trajectories, and in constituting ongoing processes of exchange. Perhaps in the light of this reality we may begin to unsettle notions of social stability as they circulate within children's studies, together with the attendant idea that care is best vested in a limited number of persons who remain caregivers for protracted periods. The survival of the young people in the study has been due largely to the capacious ways in which networks of kin have offered care in the face of death and other forms of social attrition.

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Notes

1. The Child Support Grant, offering R170 (approximately $26) per child per month for poor children up to the age of 18 is the state grant with the most up-take in South Africa.
2. Interview extracts appearing in the text were recorded in isiZulu and translated into English. Pseudonyms are used for the names of children and young people, as well as the settlement in which they lived.

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