Chapter Five:
Love in a Time of Adversity

> Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is as strong as death (Solomon's Song, Chapter viii, verse 6, the Bible).
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> 'You are a beautiful person, Toloki. That is why I want you to teach me how to live. And how to forgive.' 'You are the one who will teach me, Noria' (Mda: 151).

The chapter narrates a love story of two HIV positive people, Ntombikayise Dladla and Olwethu Njabulo Bhengu. Depicting how they came to desire one another and how their courtship negotiated the discovery of the affliction they held in common, it suggests the implosive presence of HIV/AIDS within a relationship, and yet indicates how they upheld their wish to embrace life. Despite being ill, they insisted on the completion of drawn-out marriage negotiations.[1] Neither Ntombikayise nor Njabulo came from wealthy families. The completion of a marriage held the possibility of respected personhood in the face of poverty and illness, notwithstanding marriage's sometimes repressive contours.[2] They came to live life in an acute way, apprehending the closeness of death: an apprehension that marked a journey through fear, through an initial compulsion to allocate blame - at least on Ntombikayise's part - into a place of mutual respect and care.

Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's story is one in which illness and the building of a particular kind of union were inextricably intertwined. In facing their illness openly, and in appearing in public together to speak of it, they came to reshape, to some extent, commonly held ideas of masculinities and femininities. In an area where many men insisted (at the level of conceptualisation, and often in practice) on a differential standing between men and women in their negotiation of intimacy, Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's story is atypical.[3] I relate it, however, because it suggests ways in which partnerships may strengthen through adversity, rather than dissolve. It indicates an amplification of each person's sense of self over time reminiscent of Foucault's emergence of the ethical subject through care of the self: 'the self taking itself as a work to be accomplished' (Davidson 2005: 128, Foucault 1986). It is a story that although marking changes in each

individual demonstrates the importance of interdependence between people. It is a story of hope, necessary to tell in a context in which so many have died, because in Ntombikhayise's and Njabulo's case death is postponed and a future envisaged.

It is important to insert desire, or more pertinently, Eros into an exploration of the effects of HIV/AIDS within intimacy, as its disruptive and generative power in relation to sexual relations and the creation of wider worlds has largely been omitted from 'antiseptic' discourses on the mechanics of sex in the context of HIV/AIDS.[4] In writing about HIV and how people are taught about prevention, for example, sexual life and how it is interwoven with various kinds of social relations is invariably flattened to focus on the mechanics of a limited form of heterosexual sex. The discourse employed is medical and technical. People are told to 'use a condom' to avoid contracting the disease - a matter of adopting a rudimentary technique. Yet techniques that seem simple to promoters of prevention campaigns may profoundly disturb the way people have come to experience and understand intimacy, such as that within marriage.[5] The way sexual life is embedded in how people imagine the fulfillment and unfolding of desires, holding, yet reaching out beyond the act of sex, is omitted.

The chapter explores the absence of literal fecundity in relation to the surprising fecundities of a certain kind of love in the context of HIV/AIDS. It therefore raises the tensions between social expectations of fertility in marriage and the potentially death-dealing effects of HIV/AIDS on fertility. Part One charts Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's relationship and their accommodation of the illness over time. It is an account of the care each offered the other. Part Two deals with publicly held and enduring metaphors of care in the process of gift exchange between their respective families in completing the marriage. An exploration of the symbolism of care, together with particular hierarchical and gendered inflections is accomplished through an examination of the exchange of everyday objects used in the ongoing cleansing, nourishment and comportment of the body. Their naming and use are layered with allusions to the generative force of desire, sex and fecundity. Their formal exchange within a heightened ritual context, suggests how objects may 'impress' various meanings upon those who have come to exchange them, making visible how forms of care emerge through the taking up of obligations held and formed within relationships between and within families, in this case, created through

marriage. The latter social relationships include those between the living, and between the living and the dead.[6] Ongoing attempts at the formation and repair of the above relationships create the social ground from which hoped for generosities may spring. Yet folded in with generosities is the shadowy undertow of everyday life, the way norms create forms of exclusion and silence.

The sections of the chapter appear alongside one another in order to draw out the tension between personal intimacy and the immediate challenges of the ravages of illness, and a simultaneous search for social recognition through the symbolic staging of publicly held norms of care in rituals to do with marriage. The personal and the normative imply differing temporalities. The first is linked to the disorganization that illness intermingled with desire create within social worlds. In the face of chronic illness and the imminent possibility of death, futures are foreshortened. The second temporality implies the projection of a long-term future in which ongoing generation is seemingly unproblematic and where the continuity between generations is provided by the protection and generative powers of ancestral shades. Ntombikhayise's and Njabulo's story is one in which the two temporalities of necessity mingle and where the projection of a hoped for long-term future bears its own defiance and poignancy.

PART ONE

Of meetings

I came to know Ntombikayise, her mother, her daughter and others living in and around her mother's homestead over a three-year period. I also met Njabulo, Ntombikayise's husband, his mother, his daughter, his brother's wife and her two sons. On first meeting Ntombikayise, I learnt of her activities as a home-based-carer, a position in which she volunteered to visit the ill in their homesteads and to assist patients in liaising with formal health institutions.[7] I visited her mother, a diviner (*isangoma*), in her own homestead. Soon Ntombikayise confided her HIV positive status to Phumzile and myself.

When we visited her at her marital home, Ntombikayise began to speak of her great love for her husband and the complex marriage negotiations that had taken place between their respective families. We poured delightedly over a set of photographs

depicting major exchanges of gifts, a church marriage with seven bridesmaids and seven groomsmen, and a reception in Ntombikayise's parents' home area. Other photographs depicted the subsequent ceremonies at Ntombikayise's husband's home, where proceedings included her father introducing the ancestral shades of his lineage to her new place of residence and informing them of her marriage into a new family.

At Ntombikayise's marital home, I learned that her sister-in-law had contracted HIV/AIDS, having lost her husband to the disease a year earlier. Ntombikayise soon formed a bond with her in which they freely discussed their illness. They kept knowledge of their illness from their mother-in-law for some time. I then met Njabulo, her husband, who during the course of the research was involved in construction work in distant towns. He was a founding member of a seasoned *isicathamiya* group, the Black Notes, made up of men in their forties and fifties who had performed in the Ladysmith area and in Durban for many years.[8] Njabulo was delighted that I visited his wife and mother at his homestead, and it was not long before I began watching some of the group's performances.

Through deepening of ties, Ntombikayise, Njabulo, Phumzile and I became firm friends, and the couple began to visit me at my home. I attended public forums in which they spoke of their relationship, of their discovery of the illness they held in common, and their ways of dealing with it. They were persuaded to do so at the prompting of a local Non Governmental Organisation (NGO), attempting to spread AIDS awareness amongst church-goers. It was at the latter meetings that I became particularly aware of Njabulo's respect for, and graciousness towards his wife: qualities that were conveyed in his rich use of language. I was privy too to the couple's stated need to sometimes withdraw from public appearances. In particular, I was privileged to be singled out by Njabulo as the person, a relative 'outsider', with whom he felt at ease in speaking of his illness, even when the need to withdraw from public appearances arose.

Ntombikayise and Njabulo were the only couple I saw speaking in public of their HIV positive status. It is from the above diverse sets of interactions with Ntombikayise's and her husband's families that I write an account of their 'love story'.

Beginnings of love and negotiation for marriage

At the age of nineteen, Ntombikayise Dladla became involved with a man for the first time. (*Ukuqala kwami ukuhlangana nomuntu wesilisa*.) Soon thereafter, 'great misfortune befell [her]' (*Ngavelelwa yishwa elikhulu*): She separated (*sahlukana*) from her lover after having given birth to a daughter, Nonhlanhla. Nine years later, and having become a practicing charismatic Christian, she met Njabulo, the man she was to marry. As their courtship progressed, Ntombikayise found that she wanted to make love to Njabulo, and yet because of the strictures of her church, thought it best to persuade him to delay a sexual relationship until after they were married. The desire they had for one another, however, proved too strong. For Ntombikayise, abstinence became difficult because she claimed: 'I loved [Njabulo] in an astonishing way, my flesh troubling me greatly'. ('*Ngangimthanda ngendlela emangalisayo*. *Inyama yayingihlupha*.') Once she had formally accepted Njabulo as a lover, an agreement referred to in isiZulu as *ukuqoma*, Ntombikayise was impressed that when she met with him, ostensibly to have sex for the first time, they spent the night speaking at length about their backgrounds, their families, the places in which they had lived as children and what they wished for in their relationship. It was some time after the above meeting that Ntombikayise and Njabulo began 'the work of the mat' ('*umsebenzi wocansi*'), that is, began having sexual relations.

To Ntombikayise's joy, early one morning in June, 2000, approximately nine months after their first serious meeting, an *umkhongi* (marriage negotiator)[9] arrived at her father's homestead. In accordance with local protocol, he spoke from outside the homestead, projecting his voice, 'asking respectfully for good relations (*ukukhuleka*), and good friendship (*ubuhlobo obuhle*)' with the Dladlas. He asked 'to build a fire (*ukokhela umlilo*)': a reference to both the potential creation of a new hearth for the couple, but also to the life-giving heat generated by sexual desire and its consummation. With the above forms of address, the *umkhongi* asked to open marriage negotiations. Central to his visit was the promise, or 'announcement' of a red heifer from the Bhengus to the Dladlas, a beast that would form part of *ilobolo*, the bridewealth; a gift of cattle from the groom's family to the bride's father.[10] Ntombikayise suggested that when she heard the *umkhongi* 'asking for good relations through a heifer, a red beast with four legs', she 'was so happy [she] did not know where [the sun] rose or where it set'. ('*Ngangingazi nokuthi*

liphumaphi lishonaphi.') (Interview: 26 May 2004.) Implicit within the announcement of a red heifer was the idea of its future fertility in that once it had reached maturity it would produce calves. As there is metaphoric resonance between people and cattle in the context in which Ntombikayise and Njabulo lived, the announcement of the heifer pointed to hoped-for fertility in a wife.

Subsequent to the *umkhongi's* first appearance, a series of protracted marriage negotiations ensued in which bridewealth cattle were ultimately given by the Bhengus to the Dladlas, and in which household gifts and clothing were exchanged between the two families in cycles of gift-giving, the most prominent of which were the ceremonies of *umembeso* and *umabo* (see below). On the one hand, the bride's family made up a list of *izicelo* (requests) for gifts to be distributed amongst their relatives, and on the other hand, the bride collected gifts over time to reciprocate those given by the groom's family. It was the *umkhongi* who, in Ntombikayise's words, acted as a 'postman' in delivering lists of gifts requested from each family.

The force of desire

The powerful attraction between Ntombikayise and Njabulo is best captured in Ntombikayise's words. They show the strength and enlivening qualities of desire, the way in which heartfelt resolutions may be disrupted, propelling one into states of emotional and physical acuity, into passions, suffering and delight over which one may have little control. Into a field of heightened feeling, the loving curiosity to know more about the person with whom one is in love is evident. As she told her story, her voice soft with tenderness, Ntombikayise's eyes sparkled. She smiled shyly and laughed, her right hand coming to rest at times on her heart. Her vibrant presence showed how a reiteration of past events created a welling-up of feeling and of desire.

Ntombikayise's attitude in the telling is reminiscent of that which Julia Kristeva (1987: 3) has described as a crisis of love: an enlivening affliction accompanied by a vertigo of identity and of words in the person struck by love. Yet in that very affliction the possibility of renewal resides. For Kristeva, love is a 'sudden revelation', a 'cataclysm' of which one speaks only after the fact. She asks whether the manifestations of love in an unsettled body, 'the body swept away, present in all its limbs…: shaky

voice, dry throat, starry eyes, flushed or clammy skin, throbbing heart' could be likened to symptoms of fear. And suggests that the onset of love manifests both 'the fear and the need of no longer being limited…the fear of crossing and the desire to cross the boundaries of the self (*ibid*: 6)'. Returning to Ntombikayise, of her own experience of love she said:

> [In 1997] I met a man, Olwethu Njabulo Bhengu,[11] next to the butchery in Ladysmith (the major district town). A woman from the church accompanied me. I was still very taken with the Gospel at that time.
>
> When he met me, this young man said, '*Sawubona sisi* (I see you, sister)'. I acknowledged him. Then this brother said [to my companion], 'I want this sister to cook for me at my home, to cook for my mother (*Ngifuna losisi ayongiphekela ekhaya, ayophekela nomama*' – overtly an assertion of the wish to marry Ntombikayise, yet quite a formulaic phrase used in courtship).[12]
>
> He then passed by. But his passing by left an open wound in my heart. (*Wabe esedlula, kepha ukudlula kwake kwasala kuyixhwele enhliziyweni yami*). I said, 'Oh, my people! I have seen this brother'. It was as if I had been hit on the head (*Ngashayisana ekhanda*). Because I was still devoted to God, I said, 'God, you said according to your word that I must examine closely whether a person is coming in truth.'
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> It went on and on like that [my feelings for this man], and in 1998, I was crossing an intersection from the robot near Kentucky, the old one.[13] He came from the other side next to the [taxi-]rank. We met in the middle of the road where we looked at each other. Neither of us spoke. The robot closed (turned red). I returned to the side of the road and he also went back with me. When we were next to the robot he said, 'Sisi, I have seen you before'. I also said that I had seen him before. 'Where have you seen me?' I pretended I did not know. He then asked, 'Aren't you the child of *uBaba* (Father) Dladla, the pastor?' I said that I was. He said, 'It was you whom I saw, and I told you that I want you to cook for my mother at home.'
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> The trouble started. My heart started to jump, jump. (*Yaqala inkathazo. Yabe isiqala-ke inhliziyo yagxuma gxuma*.) I said, 'Oh! Here is this young man again.' It went on throughout 1998 and 1999. And in September 1999 I accepted him as my lover (*ngamqoma*).[14]
>
> …I had to meet with this brother. I told him about the Gospel, that people should not sleep with one another until they were married. This brother said he wanted to take me then (to have sex). I also had my doubts about waiting for the correct time to meet because this thing is not really there (*ayikho phela lento*) (meaning the strictures of the church were not reasonable).
>
> …When we met, I thought we would do a big piece of work (*sizokwenza umsebenzi omkhulu*, an allusive reference to making love). But this brother wanted to hear all about my background, my beginnings, all of it (*usafuna ukuzokuzwa imvelaphi yami yonke*). I had found an amazing brother. He is not a believer (a Christian); he sings *ingoma yobusuku* (night song)[15], and dances the songs (*uzigidela izingoma*). When we met, he said, 'My sister, you said you are a Christian and you

> want us to come together in marriage. Today I ask that each of us speak the truth. Where do you come from and where are you going?' Indeed we slept the whole night without doing anything (without having sex). Some time after this meeting we began the-work-of-the-mat (*umsebenzi wocansi*, sex). (Interview: 26 May 2004.)

Ntombikayise's illness

As written above, the impassioned beginnings of Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's relationship and discussions concerning what each of them wanted from it led to the onset of marriage negotiations between their families. In the midst of the negotiations, in July 2002, Ntombikayise and Njabulo discussed their longing for a child. Ntombikayise had difficulties in falling pregnant.[16] She and Njabulo had a child each from previous relationships. Ntombikayise's daughter, Nonhlanhla, lived with her up until Ntombikayise's marriage, remaining in Ntombikayise's parents' homestead thereafter.[17] Njabulo's daughter, Sbo, remained in her father's homestead after his marriage. Given the existence of children from previous relationships, Njabulo's and Ntombikayise's inability to conceive in a relationship linked to marriage was particularly painful. As Ntombikayise described it, after having gone to a hospital to try to locate the problem, a doctor suggested that she 'clean out her womb'. (It was not clear whether this was a reference to a DNC or to medication for infection.) She was also persuaded to have an HIV test, and it was then that she came to learn for the first time that she was HIV positive.

On hearing the news, Ntombikayise was greatly distressed. Her feelings were compounded by the fact that she had already lost a brother and a sister to the disease. As a home-based carer, she had unsuccessfully tried to persuade her brother to go to the clinic for treatment. Her brother had decided not to take any medication.[18]

When Ntombikayise first heard of her HIV status, the urge to commit suicide was strong. In a diminished state, she questioned her future plans to get married to Njabulo:

> I saw it (the disease) as this thing eating me up. It wanted me to take something to kill myself. (*Ngabona ukuthi lento iyangidla. Ifuna ukuthi ngithathe into ethize ngizibulale.*)… I said that this thing could not be cured. It is not curable. It was only that I had to wait for death. (*Ngathi mina lento ayilapheki ayelashwa. Kusho ukuthi nje kufanele ngilindele ukufa*.)

> The reason I lost weight was not because of my being ill. I lost weight because of my heart. (*Ngehla nasemzimbeni. Ngangingehliswa ukuthi ngiyagula ngangehliswa yinhliziyo*.) I told my mother. She was worried, and then told my father. It was bad at home. I then asked them how it would be if we asked the *kwa*Bhengu people (literally, the people from the place of the Bhengus) to wait. They should not continue with the negotiations because I didn't know what kind of a life we were going to lead. My mother said that she had an idea that I should tell my *umkhwenyana* (betrothed) that I had gone and found that I had this. At first I doubted whether I should tell him. (Interview: 26 May 2004.)

Her words convey the idea of being taken over by the virus, and an apprehension of diminishing power within herself. She envisaged the disease as striking a blow, not only to her body, but to her spirit, and indeed casting a shadow over all her future plans.

> I then sought a way to tell this brother that we should leave behind the story of our wedding. (*Ngase ngifuna indlela yokuthi ngitshele lobhuti ukuthi sihlukane nendaba yomshado*). I could not find a way because by that time he had asked for me, and had given *ilobolo* (bridewealth), but I had not yet been dressed, [given the clothes] to prepare me as a bride. (*Ngangingasayiboni* [*indlela*] *ngoba ngalesosikhathi wayesecelile walobola kodwa ngangingakambeswa ngilungiselela ukuba umakoti*.) In my heart I told myself that when I met him in town, I would refuse him. I wanted to tell him that I wanted him to separate from me because he had poured this illness into me (*usengithelele ngalesifo*). (27 July 2005, Ntombikayise and Njabulo speak at an AIDS education workshop, Busingatha.)

Rather than succumbing to the disease's 'promptings' 'to take something to kill [herself]', Ntombikayise visited a clinic to seek medical advice, having been persuaded to do so by her youngest brother. Despite her knowledge as a home-based carer, it was only with her brother's support and insistence that medication would help her and that she should not give up that she became more hopeful. Ntombikayise was surprised and mollified by Njabulo's response when she eventually told him of her HIV positive status. She had initially wanted to blame him in order to deflect any blame or rejection he might have directed towards her. Her anger is forcefully captured in her description of his having 'poured the illness into [her]'. The mixing of sexual fluids, that under optimal conditions suggests a mingling with an Other in which ecstatic dissolution of boundaries is welcomed (at least according to Kristeva), now takes on an opposing quality - one that is viscerally horrifying and life-threatening.[19]

In Okhahlamba, an optimal commingling of fluids in heterosexual sex is understood in particular ways. For many, the 'water of a man', semen, is perceived as the substance that moulds a child in its mother's womb through the work of a father's ancestral shades (see Bergland, 1976: 94, 117). Female sexual fluids are often viewed negatively, and are, in some cases, controlled through the practice of 'dry sex' where women use substances to absorb vaginal moisture and to 'tighten' the vaginal canal.[20] The blood of a woman, however, - that which is discarded monthly when not pregnant - is brought to the place of conception by a woman's shades, and is understood as providing the sustenance required in the formation of a child. 'Water' and 'blood' when combined are construed as positive, not only most obviously in being brought together to create a child, but for the people engaged in an intermingling of substances. Because of its association with death, the presence of HIV leads to a violent overturning of such connotations.[21]

Suspension of blame

When Ntombikayise first told Njabulo, he sat quietly and then suggested that if she had the illness, he most probably had it also. Neither Ntombikayise nor Njabulo showed any outward signs of illness, yet Njabulo had had intermittent periods of ill-health that he had successfully treated with herbal medicines. Njabulo's maturity must be taken into account in understanding his response to Ntombikayise. He was of an age, where he wished to create a marriage in order to build a homestead. Becoming a respected head of a homestead ideally demanded dignity, and the careful ability to weigh up circumstances. Njabulo stated that neither of them was young any more. He was in his early forties and Ntombikayise in her mid-thirties. It was therefore not possible to say for certain where the illness had come from, as they had both had previous lovers. Njabulo was intimating indirectly that he, too, might be HIV positive, although he had not tested. He affirmed that it was not possible to precisely allocate blame. Even if they both had the disease, it did not mean that they should abandon their plans to get married. They would get married and live the best life they could, 'as they were'. In Ntombikayise's words, spoken at a meeting to educate church-goers, she said:

> He asked me how I had experienced the hospital. I said that I had gone well, but that the biggest problem was that I had *ingculaza* (the virus). My intention was that I wanted to point at him (*Inhloso yami ngangifuna ukuthi ngiyikhombe kuye*), blame him for the illness. He sat quietly and then said, 'If you have *ingculaza* it means then that I have it too'. I thought that he would say that he had got *ingculaza* from me and that we should leave things. He did not tell that kind of story. He put it behind him. I asked him what we were supposed to do. He said I should continue to go along with the treatment (Ntombikayise was taking Bactrim to help prevent various opportunistic infections), and he said he would also go to test his blood. I said in my heart, 'He is not leaving me, even though I thought we would part, and I would die'. He did not go there. (27 July 2005, Ntombikayise and Njabulo speak at an Aids education workshop at Busingatha.)[22]

In Ntombikayise's narrative, fears were related not only to the possibility of physical death, but the death of her social bond with Njabulo, and the heartfelt emotions with which she had invested her wish to be married to him. The prospect of physical death was interwoven with the excruciating pain of the possible death of intimacy. Neither can the two types of death be easily separated. Her initial horror was partially informed by her knowledge of the ways AIDS destroys ties of intimacy and relationship.

At the same meeting, where Ntombikayise and Njabulo spoke to a group of church-goers, Njabulo was asked by members of the audience why Ntombikayise had not been blamed for the illness, as was the experience of many daughters-in-law in a patrilineal context in which they left their own people to marry 'strangers'.[23] In his speech, Njabulo emphasised that he had never blamed her. Approximately three months before their wedding, in December 2003, Njabulo became increasingly ill. He developed suppurating sores all over his body and could no longer work. Njabulo linked Ntombikayise's blamelessness for the disease to his association of moral goodness with the institution of marriage. Here blamelessness was associated with what was regarded as socially life-giving and admirable, as in Ntombikayise's case, above. Consequently, Njabulo suggested that the members of his household, who came to know of their HIV positive status after the marriage, tended to blame previous girlfriends for the illness:

> In the big home (referring to his parents' home) they took it (the illness) as a death I had received in certain ways. (*Ekhaya elikhulu bakuthatha ngokuthi ukufa nje ngakuthola ngendlela ezithize*.) My bride, I insisted, had not yet arrived at my home. It was not appropriate [to blame her for the illness]. Rather they said (the people of my home), 'These things (referring to girlfriends) that used to come in and out of this home, perhaps it is them?' (*Kodwa bathi, 'Lezinto (izintombi) ezazilibe zingena*

ziphuma layikhaya, mhlambe yizo?') (27 July 2005, Njabulo speaks at an Aids education workshop at Busingatha.)

For all Njabulo's generosity towards Ntombikayise, his statement deflects blame for the illness to other women,[24] especially women who do not share the status of wife, and who are referred to disparagingly, as things.

Completing a marriage

Ntombikayise and Njabulo continued with their marriage plans. It was only in January 2004, after the marriage had been completed that Njabulo eventually took an HIV test. Before his test, on the 27th of February 2002, Njabulo accompanied Ntombikayise's father and youngest brother to see ten *ilobolo* cattle, a definite indication that he was committed to completing the marriage. In July of that year, the cattle were transferred to the Dladlas. Although eleven cattle had been requested as *ilobolo* by Ntombikayise's father, one was withheld because Ntombikayise had given birth to a child in a previous relationship.[25]

On the 9th of October, 2002, the groom's family dressed Ntombikayise in the appropriate clothes of a bride (*ukwembeswa*). She received three sets of new clothes: two pinafores that reached the ground and a shorter red suit. The long dresses would be worn as the appropriate dress for a new bride. She was given a shawl and several headscarves with which to shield herself from the gaze of her in-laws. A particular form of dress whilst in her husband's homestead would become part a series of respectful avoidances that she would enact in relation to her in-laws. The latter would include linguistic avoidance of words that rhymed with her husband's name and the names of older men in her husband's homestead. She would also no longer refer to Njabulo and his male relatives by name, but in the case of her husband would call him 'father of Sbo', after the name of his child.[26] The red outfit was for her to wear on trips to town, or to work. The groom and his *umkhongi* were also given complete sets of clothing by Ntombikayise's family. The latter gifts were part of the ceremony, *umembeso*, to which the groom brought a large number of gifts for the *abakhwekazi* (women from Njabulo's family-in-law).

Ntombikayise and Njabulo enacted the final ritual components of their marriage on the 20th and the 21st of December, 2003. They had a lavish church wedding in Ntombikayise's home area on the first day, and were married *ebaleni,* referring to a 'traditional' wedding in the yard and cattle kraal of her husband's people, the Bhengus, on the second day. In the second ceremony, Ntombikayise was introduced to her husband's ancestors. Her father, calling out the praises of the Dladlas, also introduced Ntombikayise's ancestors to her husband's homestead, informing them of her marriage at 'the place of the Bhengus'. The introduction was accomplished through a present to his daughter of the *inkomo yomgano,* the marriage beast, a beast from her natal home. Like the animal announced by the *umkhongi* at the beginning of marriage negotiations, the marriage beast was a heifer.[27] It was on the same day that Ntombikayise distributed gifts to the *abalingani* (the groom's people) in the ceremony of *umabo*.

The church wedding took place in a hall in Thintwa, the mountainous area in which Ntombikayise had been born. Over 200 guests attended. The couple were accompanied by seven groomsmen and seven bridesmaids dressed in suits and satins. Ntombikayise wore a white wedding gown and veil: Njabulo, a blue suit with a Chinese collar. The wedding ceremony was conducted by a priest from Ntombikayise's church. The couple made vows to one another, exchanged rings, and signed a marriage register. The formal marriage was followed by a reception in the same hall with speeches given by both Njabulo and Ntombikayise describing how they had met and fallen in love. They did not refer to their HIV positive status in their speeches.

Njabulo's illness and the pursuit of healing

Three months prior to and during his wedding Njabulo had been extremely ill. Consequently, Ntombikayise held him upright for part of the ceremony at Thintwa. Before the wedding, she had nursed him, bathing the suppurations covering his body. As she described it:

> We were married on the 20th of December, 2003. From August of the same year, before we got married he was sick. He was afflicted with boils (literally carried by boils, *amathumba*). Right up until the day our marriage came, he was ill, sleeping down on the ground. He no longer worked. I asked what we could do. The day of our marriage steadily approached; he was a person who could only lie down. Yet he had offered himself to me, I had offered myself to him (*Ngokuthi manje yena uzinikele*

kimi. Nami ngizinikele kuye). The time came for the wedding. On the 19th of December, 2003, the wedding began (literally 'entered', referring the arrival of the groom's party). On the 20th we got married. When our wedding day came, I held him [up]. He told me to hold him with strength because if I had not done so he would have fallen, only to be hit by the ground. I saw that my groom was going (dying). On the 20th we got married in the church. On the 21st we married at the groom's home. Our wedding finished. On the afternoon after the marriage I came to see that this person was extremely ill, he was ill in the way a person is ill who is about to go, to die. (27 July 2005, Ntombikayise and Njabulo speak at an AIDS education workshop at Busingatha.)

Njabulo had always treated his own ill-health with herbal medicines purchased from a particular *inyanga* (herbalist). Like many people in Okhahlamba, he associated hospitals with death and disrespectful treatment on the part of nurses. After the wedding, Njabulo and Ntombikayise were left without financial resources due to the accumulated costs of the marriage. There was no longer any money to buy herbal remedies, or even food. In the week after the wedding, Ntombikayise despaired that her husband would die. As a person of the church, she began to pray, a course of action that lead to an unexpected series of events. In her own words, and speaking in a public meeting at which both Ntombikayise and Njabulo were present, she said:

On Tuesday, during the first week of my marriage, I saw during the night that this person (Njabulo) was dying. He said I should take him from the bed, because he was sick and dying. I said, 'Oh my Lord' to myself, 'let me pray'. I begged (*ngikhuleke*). 'This thing is nothing', I said to myself. 'Let me take the Bible and begin by reading'. When I opened it, R200 (approximately $33) fell out. We did not have money; we had nothing [because of the wedding expenses]. He has an *inyanga* whom he used to visit from a place that I will not mention here.[28] That *inyanga* of his pulled death so it would ease off (*Leyonyanga yakhe yathi ukudonsa ukufa kwathi ukuthi gozololo*). When I looked I saw, 'My! Here is money'. I said, 'Here is money, Father of Sbo'. The prayer stopped. Everything stopped (laughter).

'*Hawu*! *Nansi imali*! Here is money!' He too woke up. He said, 'Where is it?' I said, 'Here it is, let us count'. We found that it was enough money to go *enyangeni* (to the place of the healer). Because when you scoop medicine that is smoked and licked from the palm of the hand (*umuthi wokuncinda*), just a small thing equal to the size of a finger is R50 (approximately $8), a small thing. We did not have money for food, but we thought that his younger brother should take him to an *inyanga*. That same evening I went to ask his brother to help to take Sbo's father early in the morning to an *inyanga*. I told him I did not have petrol.[29] The money was only enough for the medicine of an *inyanga*. He said there was no problem (literally, no stories, *akunandaba*). The younger brother got up in the morning and rushed him to the *inyanga*. He returned extremely ill. The medicine was here. We saw that it no

longer worked. My spirit became depressed, because the medicine was not working and that had been the last of my money.

It came to me that I was a home-based carer. I said, 'Now, the thing that we will do, father (*baba*, referring to her husband), I ask that tomorrow we wake up so that you can go to the clinic'. He replied that it was a place he would not go to. He said that he was extremely ill and asked what help the clinic would give him. I said that the clinic would help him a lot. Perhaps we would get a letter to transfer him to a hospital. He said he was not going to the hospital. I said to him, 'Then eat this medicine!' When I counted all the bottles full of medicine in the house that had not helped him, I said, 'Go to the clinic. When you return from the clinic you can continue with your medicines'. He said he was not going to the clinic because they would send him to the hospital and when he arrived there he would die. I said I would not be stubborn with him (meaning she would no longer speak with him). I spoke with his younger brother and suggested we take him to the clinic the following morning. 'The stories of *izinyanga* (herbalists) are finished. The money has finished, and we are now rushing to the place where it is free (the clinic) (*Isiphelile indaba yezinyanga*. *Imali iphelile*. *Sesijahe kwamahala manje*). We are now going to the free clinic'. When we arrived at the clinic, I myself did everything, keeping a place in line to register so that we would get a card because I knew he did not want anything (he did not want to be there). He stayed in the car. When the queue came near to his turn, I fetched him from the car. He went in to see the nurse. When we arrived in front of the nurse she saw that boils, *amathumba* covering his body. She sent him to hospital. Indeed, the nurse wrote a letter to transfer him to the hospital. It was in the hospital that we really got help. After that I counselled him by asking if he remembered that I was positive. He said that he remembered this very well. I asked, 'How about you going to take blood so that you can see the cause of these boils?' He listened. His blood was taken. He returned back (to the hospital) and found that he was positive.

Afterwards, everything went smoothly because I had been his only support, his prop, his assistant (*ngiwusekela wakhe*). Then the programme of CD4 count came. His was very, very low (70). Mine was high (750). He then learnt about the medicine, *umshanguzo*, the ARVs. He then began taking the pills.

This is where I saw that if you listen to one another, if you understand and communicate with one another and listen to a person there is hope, because with him I am able to live in a large way. Again, my life is continuing very well with him. *Uma nizwana nomuntu nilalelana likhona ithemba ngoba ngaye ngaphila khakhulu futhi impilo yami isaqhubeka kakhulu ngaye*. (27 July 2005, Ntombikayise and Njabulo speak at an Aids education workshop at Busingatha.)

Ntombikayise's account charts the way in which she respected her husband's choice of medicine and at a point of extremis tried to ease his inclusion into settings where biomedical treatment could be sought. She insisted on his going to a clinic when herbal medicines no longer were effective. She used all her powers to try to persuade Njabulo to try another way. And in the end, when persuasion failed, she found means of

getting him to a clinic with his brother's help. Her words suggest many things: her refusal to give up; the importance of sharing fears; the uneasy coexistence of different repertoires of care, and yet the ways in which they may be used in combination, in oscillation, or sequentially.

Courage in the face of death

When Ntombikayise had completed her account of her relationship with Njabulo at an open public meeting in which she had told the above story, it was his turn to speak:

> The mother has beaten strongly (meaning that she spoke in an admirable and inspiring way). Now I will beat a little bit, I will speak a little. (*Umama useshaye kakhulu. Manje mina sengi zoshaya kancane*.) This is because I see that she is jealous (a joke and a compliment implying that Njabulo did not want to outshine Ntombikayise in his speech). It is as she has explained it.
>
> I have seen that the heads of the homesteads have been digging [graves] (*abanumzane bayagubha*). I was blown here and there, I was weak. My flesh was no longer here. My trousers, I folded them over [at the waist]. (*Ngase ngiphephuka*. *Izinyama sezingasekho*. *Ibhulukwe ngase ngiliphinda*.) When I walked, looking at myself, I saw that it was finished with me (…*sekuphelile ngami*). It was found that the mother, with whom I am married, has patience. She has a liver. [She is truly courageous.] I was covered with suppurating sores all over my body. I was burned, truly burned. The mother said that I should go and check my blood. I went to check. I went back to collect the results. They said I had *ingculaza*, the virus (HIV). They said I was supposed to go to the CDC (Communicable Diseases Clinic) so that I could get pills. I then learnt about the pills. I studied until I received them. I am now eating the medicine (*umshanguzo* ARVs).
>
> Eating the pills has helped me, because in my life I feel that I am now well. I have life again. The courage of Ntombi helped me, because if she had been a light person without courage, it would have been clear. [I would have died]. However, it happened that a child of a person said, 'No, wherever you die, I will be there also'. (…*umntwana womuntu uthi*, '*Cha lapho ufa khona ngizoba lapho*'.)[30] (27 July 2005, Ntombikayise and Njabulo speak at an Aids education workshop at Busingatha.)

Njabulo's words were a poetic and loving testament to his wife, Ntombikayise, suggesting that through her patience and courage both were able not only to survive but to expand the ways in which they lived.

Levinas (1989 [1987]: 39-42) writes instructively of suffering and the approach of death in ways that resonate with Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's journey. He draws a distinction: 'While in moral pain, one can preserve an attitude of dignity and

compunction, and consequently already be free; physical suffering in all its degrees entails the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence' (*ibid*:39) In suffering there is an 'absence of all refuge…The whole acuity of suffering lies in this impossibility of retreat. It is the fact of being backed up against life and being' (*ibid*: 40). The latter quotations give an indication of how Njabulo may have suffered corporeally when most ill, as well as the way in which the approach of death lay within his suffering.

For Levinas, it is out of the realm of human possibilities to meet one's death. Death is not something that can be assumed, but rather comes upon one. Even on the brink of death, if a person is still able to inhabit the present moment, what Levinas describes as 'the now', she remains in the realm of possibilities. For Levinas, death cancels out awareness. He argues that one is not present at the moment of death. Death is the end of heroism, because it catches a person unawares.[31] Thus death marks the limits of the human, and is essentially unknowable. With death's arrival one is 'enchained', 'overwhelmed', and 'in some way passive'. However, prior to death there is always a last chance. For Levinas, it is the last chance that the hero seizes, and not death. 'The hero is the one who always glimpses a last chance, the one who obstinately finds chances' (*ibid*: 42).

If we consider Njabulo's suffering prior to, during, and after his wedding, he himself felt the closeness of death, and his suffering constituted the inescapable experience of being 'backed up against life'(*ibid*:42). His life, through the diminution of his powers was being 'encroached' upon. The possibilities of his marriage and the future it implied were being 'overwhelmed'. Ntombikayise and Njabulo's relationship is marked by heroism, as conceived of by Levinas, in that both obstinately sought a 'last chance' in sensing the approach of death. Even when Njabulo asked to be removed from their bed, to be placed on the floor in readiness for death, Ntombikayise refused to give up, and through her actions and imprecations found a way that happened to lead to Njabulo's 'return to life'.

Longing for a child

In spite of the distinctiveness of Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's relationship, it took place in a context of broader social relations and expectations. One of the great

expectations of marriage is that children be born into it. When Ntombikayise and Njabulo came to know of Ntombikayise's HIV positive status, they learned that unprotected sex would increase the virulence of the HIV virus in both of them. They tried using a condom. As Njabulo, referring to a condom, remarked, 'They say a coat holds the cold at bay'. ('*Bathi ibhantshi liyawabamba amakhaza*'.) Use of a condom, however, interfered with Njabulo's virility, and with ideas concerning what was appropriate for sexual relations within the context of a proposed marriage, a space in which intimacy and the exchange of fluids is most positively expressed. Both Njabulo and Ntombikayise wanted a child. To try and 'keep the virus down' they decided to limit sex to once a week. It goes without saying that the sex was unprotected. Shortly after the marriage in January, 2004, Ntombikayise's menstrual periods ceased, although, she was not pregnant. It was unclear whether this was stress related due to the progress of the virus in her own body, or whether it signaled the onset of early menopause. She was 35 years old at the time.

Ntombikayise confided in the counselor who counseled her husband before he began taking ARV treatment. Both she and Njabulo belonged to a support group based at the hospital they attended. In discussion with the young man who headed the group, she said:

> My child (a common way of greeting a younger person), as you can see I am HIV positive, but I want a child because I am at my husband's house (*emzini*). At my husband's house they are waiting for a child… Now I am getting confused about why they do not start, my periods. My husband is sad that I no longer have my periods. That is what is troubling us badly, because we do need a child. Pray for us. We want a baby. People from my husband's house want to embrace, hold with their arms (*ukugona*) a child, want to look after a child'…Now that we are trying, we cannot have a child. But a child is a gift from God. We are waiting. If God wants to give us a child we will have a child. If he does not want us to have one, we will not have. (Interview: 26 May 2004.)

Although Ntombikayise and Njabulo's relationship produced fecundities apart from procreation, the absence of a child was a painful leitmotif within it. In what I have described above, I have chartered the negotiation of a relationship between two individuals, Ntombikayise and Njabulo, as I came to understand it, and specifically the support given one to the other over periods of time and at points of particular vulnerability. Each individual showed magnanimity towards the other: Njabulo, through

refusing to allocate blame for the illness, and insisting on the completion of their marriage, and Ntombikayise through refusing to give up on their quest for healing. Through Ntombikayise's protracted insistence that they go to a 'place of free medicine', even in the face of Njabulo's unwillingness to do so, he was able to regain his vigour and strength through being one of the first people in the district to join an anti-retroviral treatment program at the district hospital, and as a consequence could resume work in the building industry. In refusing to give up on one another through adversity, the love between the two deepened, and the respect Njabulo had for his wife became palpable in his public declarations of her courage in the face of his near death.

Although theirs is a story in which the predominant gendered location of physical and day-to-day care is upheld - that is, where a woman, ill herself, nurses and cares for a man through his illness - Njabulo's willingness to join Ntombikayise on a public platform in telling the story of their love and its intermingling with illness and healing, suggests an amplification of regard, one for the other, and of respect beyond that which is often overtly given.[32] The weight of the act of appearing together in public may be appreciated if we take note of the fact that men in general in the area did not publicly discuss their illness, that there were ways in which men presented themselves that militated against certain kinds of speech in public that have to do with intimacy and vulnerability, and that in certain ways women spoke the silence of men.[33] In appearing together in public, in listening to each other's 'testimonies' with respect and mutual confirmation, Ntombikayise and Njabulo demonstrated an achieved friendship, a visible equivalence. Although there was deference, one for the other, it was the deference of admiration, and contained surprise, rather than power.

At one of the meetings I attended at which Ntombikayise and Njabulo spoke together, a pastor asked how it was for them to speak in public. Implicit within his question were fears around the vulnerability of general exposure. His asked: 'When you speak about a thing like this among the people, what is your experience of speaking in front of so many eyes?' To which Njabulo replied:

> We are free, open with this. Again we warn the people that they should look at this with different eyes. We declare that it is better for people to see everything clearly in the open. People must realise that this thing should be examined closely, because it is really something that exists. (*Sikhululekile kuloko. Futhi sixwayisa nabantu ukuthi*

bathi ukubheka ngamanye amehlo. *Sithi abantu ababone konke kusobala naku kubonakale ukuthi ngempela lento kumele iqapheleke ngoba into ekhona*.)

Ntombikayise concurred, saying:

I myself support *baba* (father). Yes, there is the problem that when you speak you may become anxious. But it comes back to you that there are many souls who are dying. Right now, our children are dying a great deal of this illness. It is better that we speak about the story, the news so that the people who depart (die) are fewer. (*Manje abantwana bethu bafa kakhulu yilesisifo*. *Kungcono siyikhulumeni lendaba ukuze abantu abahambayo babe yingcosana*.) There *is* HIV! There *is* AIDS! In truth now, this is why we live with great courage. (27 July 2005, Ntombikayise and Njabulo speak at an Aids education workshop at Busingatha.)

Ntombikayise and Njabulo came to the point where they were prepared to be seen to be open about their pursuit of health and the accommodation of the illness. Thus although Ntombikayise was an exemplary daughter-in-law, proudly taking on the range of practices associated with *ukuhlonipha,* practices of respectful avoidance in relation to her husband and his kin, what emerged over time was her strength of character and agentive action in relation to family and the wider world. Consequent upon her success in negotiating the illness with Njabulo, Ntombikayise extended her openness about their illness to her sister-in-law, and after Njabulo's health had improved, due to antiretroviral treatment, to her mother-in-law. She spoke with numerous neighbourhood women, for example, at the communal tap, where they collect water. Not only did her openness result in many people in her neighbourhood testing for HIV, but her mother-in-law began to insert knowledge gleaned about the illness from her daughter-in-law into conversations at her home between neighbours.

PART TWO

Everyday objects as metaphors of care: gift exchange in a marriage

Within their personal relationship, Ntombikayise and Njabulo offered one another particular kinds of care. Yet they lived in a social setting where expectation, power and gender-difference were folded into the daily practices and norms of care. Their wedding marked the formal recognition of their relationship by their families, friends and

neighbours, and the exchange of gifts prior to, and following on the wedding enabled a staging of ideals of care and regeneration. In the face of their illness, they gained public recognition through the gift exchanges that legitimised their union.

The ways in which gift exchange creates sets of obligation and indebtedness through time between the parties involved in exchange, is an already well established theme in anthropological literature, as is rivalry, or staged antagonism between families offering a member in marriage.[34] I choose rather to highlight a submerged theme within gift exchanges in relation to marriage in Okhahlamba, one that has been largely ignored, and that has to do with publicly held metaphors around care and domesticity. The gifts exchanged in the build up to Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's wedding, for example, bore a relation to the dailiness of care. I suggest that the ordinary tasks in serving others in domestic life take on meaning in relation to a 'language' of the objects used in carrying them out.

The drawn-out elaboration, and indeed elaborateness of the exchanges - their mounting drama and tension - suggested the magnitude, importance and status of forming a formally recognised marriage for the pair, as well as for their families. The exchanges, too, in the ways in with they marked a mounting oscillation of approach and seeming withdrawal, mirrored the playful delay and building-up of flirtation and desire. In fact, some of the gifts in early courtship bore a relation to the aesthetic appreciation, beauty and maintenance of the persons being gifted. An example is in various gifts given to the bridegroom and his *umkhongi*. Ntombikayise and her family gifted Njabulo and his *umkhongi,* each with a set of clothes, including an outer blanket onto which mirrors, toothbrushes, combs and money were affixed: all items that referred to, and enhanced the attractiveness of the men.

Exchange of objects and the metaphors of care

On a visit I made to Ntombikayise's mother high up in the mountains of Thintwa, she summed up the cycle of gift-giving between the Bhengus and the Dladlas from June 2000 to December 2003 when the wedding eventually took place:

> The story of *umabo*: I am going to call it *umabo*, because we (the bride's family) went to distribute gifts. It starts with *amalobolo nomcelo* (the opening of marriage

negotiations around bride-wealth for a girl). The requests, *izicelo* [for gifts for the bride's family] are taken [by the groom's *umkhongi*]. Some call them *izibizo* [(things) called for]. The *izicelo* are brought [to the bride's home], then the cattle (*ilobolo*) are seen. This means that the groom is committed.

He comes to call them, [the bride's family] to come and see *ilobolo* cattle. They went to see the cattle. They were all there. We could see that the groom was really serious.

Then we realised that we had to start to gather pickings, (*izingcosho*), little things, gifts.[35] By then the cattle had been seen. The groom's party came back to ask about *umembeso* (where the bride is dressed in clothes appropriate to being a bride and where some of the requested gifts are given to the bride's family), and to ask how many we were (for the purposes of gift-giving). We told them that there were twenty of us. Then they gave me a pot and some other things. Then they went back to prepare (the gathering of gifts). And we were also left to prepare.

It went on and on, and Ntombi picked things up when she went to Bergville (a small regional town). If we had some money, we gave it to her ('*simgodlise*', meaning, 'we held her'). She would buy things (*izimpahla*) and come back with them, things for herself, and for people at her husband's house, that she liked. (Interview: 16 June 2004.)

Much has been written about *ilobolo* cattle (bridewealth cattle), as well as the symbolic resonance between people and cattle among southern African peoples.[36] Yet writing concerning the exchange of other 'little gifts', 'the pickings' (*izingcosho*) alluded to above by Ntombikayise's mother, is comparatively threadbare.[37] Although Krige refers in passing to gifts distributed by the bride to her new family, there is no exploration of their possible significance.[38] The latter omission may have to do with their seemingly humble domestic nature, and the fact that many of them are given to, and some of them are made by women. As is well known, early anthropological accounts are weighted in favour of an overall emphasis on cattle and men's wealth, as is legal literature.

During the *umembeso* and *umabo* ceremonies of Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's marriage, the Dladlas and Bhengus reciprocated with gifts for all older members of each respective family. The latter gifts included a sleeping mat made of thatching grass, a pillow, a sponge mattress and a blanket. The same gifts were put aside for older people who, in living memory, had died. As ancestral shades of both men and women are intimately connected with the ongoing well-being of the living through their intervention in everyday affairs and most specifically in conception and desire, their inclusion in the handing out of wedding gifts is to be expected.[39]

Additional gifts were given to the bridal pair's parents. Even though Njabulo's father was long since deceased, he received a number of gifts over and above those given to everyone. All four parents received large enamel basins for bathing, soap and towels. The three parents who were still alive received sets of clothing appropriate to their gender: in the case of the women, pinafores, head-scarves and shawls, and in the case of Ntombikayise's father, a large trench coat. Both women were given tea sets, a teapot and a tray.

Ntombikayise's mother and her *mamezala* (mother-in-law) received gifts that at first may surprise. These included a blanket called, '*isaka lokutetela*' (the sack for giving birth), an *imbeleko*, a shawl used to carry an infant on the back, and a large blanket for shielding a child from air (*umoya*) and its sometimes malevolent influence. It was repeatedly claimed that that the blankets given by a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law, and by the son-in-law to his mother-in-law, were to thank each woman for having given birth to their respective partner. The set of gifts aimed at restoring what had been taken from each woman in the process of giving birth and marked, in some respects, the passing on of the responsibility for procreation to the next generation.[40]

The bride's gifts to her mother-in-law marked her entry into a home in which she was expected to produce children for her husband. It was expected that she would take on her *mamezala's* role in contributing to the continuity of the lineage into which she had married. The gifts drew attention to the hierarchical relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and yet showed their 'equivalence', in that they were both 'strangers' who had come to contribute to the ongoing life of a family and a patrilineage, not their own, by providing children and by undertaking work within the homestead.

To return to our itemization of gifts given: Ntombikayise's mother received a large, three-legged, cast-iron cooking pot from her son-in-law and Njabulo's mother received a number of beer strainers, *izivovo*, and eleven brooms called, '*amasondo ezinkomo*' (hooves of the cattle). The eleven brooms equaled the number of cattle asked for in *ilobolo* negotiations, and tangentially referred to the work Ntombikayise would accomplish within the homestead under the jurisdiction of her mother-in-law: work that had been compensated for through *ilobolo*. Exchanging cattle for brooms marked the exchange of cattle for work.

Ntombikayise also gave Njabulo's deceased father a clay beer-drinking vessel (*ukhamba*), a meat-tray carved out of wood (*isiqenge, uqwembe*) by men, a similarly crafted spoon for eating, and an enamel food-dish with a lid. They, too, are gifts that have a bearing on fertility and nurturance, as well as the service required from the daughter-in-law in relation to her father-in-law. It was stated that the enamel food-dish, for example, would be used to offer food made by Ntombikayise to her father-in-law at the *umsamo*, the place in the homestead where one made offerings to ancestral shades. The lid placed on top of a dish symbolized the ways in which she, as a daughter-in-law, would cover herself respectfully in the presence of her male in-laws.

Ntombikayise's mother likened the gift of the clay drinking vessel to a womb. As it was made of clay, it was associated with the ancestral shades who live in the earth and are named *abaphansi*, those from below, or of the earth. In offering beer to her deceased father-in-law at the *umsamo*, Ntombikayise would be making her husband's ancestors aware of their indirect responsibility in contributing to her future fertility through creating desire and sexual 'heat' in her husband.[41]

A few of the above mentioned gifts, including the *ukhamba*, have to do with hospitality, or forms of care beyond the parameters of a family: the cast-iron pot used in cooking food for feasts, is another, as is the *isiqenge*, the wooden meat vessel which men use to pass seared meat amongst themselves, during ritual feasts.. A clay drinking vessel is associated with the importance of relationship between kin and neighbours. Beer is drunk to draw attention to the importance of social relationships, including those accrued through marriage.[42]

The *isiqenge*, a wooden meat-platter carved by men, shares another symbolic equivalence with the *ukhamba* (beer pot), because they are both used to offer sustenance to ancestral shades. Small pieces of meat from an animal that has just been ritually slaughtered are placed on the dish when meat is offered at the *umsamo*. The meat is then burnt together with *imphepho* (*helichrysum miconiaefolium*, a herb associated with them) on blackened pottery shards (*izindengezi*) so as to be made 'palatable' for ancestral shades.[43]

Hand-crafted objects carry emotional weight, as does the daily use and meanings of common gifts given to all - the grass mats and blankets. Gifts made by hand - grass

mats, wooden meat trays, clay beer pots, brooms, beer strainers, wooden spoons - bring with them the high value attached to objects made from materials gleaned in the environment in which people live.[44] They set up a resonance between people, the living and the dead, and nature. In their use and in their staging, they at times evoke a state of being where the person using them may experience a deep sense of 'being at home'. Having been made by hand, they uphold the value of artistry and skill, and the degree of self-reliance these imply. What are the attributes of a 'feeling of being at home' if not rituals of nurturance together with attempts to contain the uncanny aspects of intimacy and the malevolence of everyday life? Crafted and bought objects, exchanged at the wedding, are used in caring for children, cleansing and caring for the body, sharing and cooking food, the sometime pleasures of sexual intimacy, and shielding individuals from pollution.

Ntombikayise's father gave his *umkhwenyana* (son-in-law) a bedroom suite, and even if Ntombikayise and Njabulo do not sleep on the grass mats during their marriage, grass mats are nevertheless associated with sexual relations and procreation. A large number of them were stowed on top of the wardrobe in Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's bedroom, two of which were given to Phumzile and myself as gifts. Sex is never referred to directly, but is called, 'the work of the mat'. Grass mats are used widely as presents to friends, visitors and neighbours, and are spread out daily for women to sit on.

Blankets have a wide number of associations, and their use is pertinent throughout a life-cycle. They are used in the process of giving birth. They are used to cradle a child. The blanket given to each child, and the ceremony performed in introducing children to their ancestors is still referred to as *imbeleko*, a reference to the sacrifice of a goat for this purpose and its skin used in the past to carry the child. Blankets are used to keep warm at night. They are used to shield female mourners from view, to create a sympathetic darkness around the body of a chief mourner who is always a woman, because of the pollution of death. The blanket forms a covering over the body when a person is steamed with medicines aimed at dispelling pollution. They shield and mark a person's vulnerability, the fact of their being 'out of sorts' in occupying a place of liminality.

In Okhahlamba, at every funeral I attended, each person was buried with a new sleeping mat and new blanket. The placing of the latter objects on top of the coffin in the

open grave constituted a powerful moment in which continuation of care and social relationship between the living and the dead was demonstrated. From the point of view of the living, placing the objects in the grave suggested responsibilities in caring for the dead, and an appeal to the dead to sustain the living through their assistance in procreation.

Arjun Appadurai (2003[1988]:5) points out a 'powerful contemporary tendency… to regard the world of things as inert and mute, set in motion and animated, indeed knowable, only by persons and their words.' Yet, as I have described them above, objects utilised in the domestic sphere become steeped in associations with moral values, with care and generation. Gifts given to the living and to the dead etch a continuum of care, straddling both worlds.

In his famous book, *The Gift*: *The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies,* Marcel Mauss (1990) suggests that things exchanged are imbued with attributes of the givers and are, therefore, a gifting of a part of the self.[45] The latter may particularly be said of hand-crafted objects. Mauss (*ibid*: 47) expresses with elegance our need for others and for social ties. Thus, in gift exchanges, one is giving and returning 'respects' or 'courtesies'. And that by giving, 'one is giving *oneself*, and if one gives *oneself*, it is because one "owes" *oneself* – one's person and one's goods – to others' (emphasis in original text). The latter ideas echo precisely Ntombikayise's words in recalling that in spite of her husband's illness, '[he] had offered [himself] to her', and [she] had offered [herself] to him'. Things given are not inactive, but are 'invested with life', seeking equivalents to replace them (*ibid*: 13). The concept of *ubuntu*, or humane relations is predicated on the idea of an ongoing generosity of exchange, and the claim that a person cannot live in an optimal way without obligations to others. It is one's relations with others that enable the good life.

People in Okhahlamba cannot conceive of everyday care or ritual without the incorporation of quotidian, yet highly significant objects. Viewed in the latter way, gift exchange can be likened to an exchange of substances, what Mauss has termed 'spiritual matter' between 'clans and individuals' and 'distributed between social ranks, the sexes, and the generations' (*ibid*: 14). In exploring the nature of gifts exchanged in the marriage

of Ntombikayise and Njabulo, I have foregrounded the resonance between objects, the meanings with which they are invested – in particular, fertility and fecundity - and the human task of striving for continuity of care and of ongoing generation.

Given that Njabulo's and Ntombikayise's world is shaped by the force of a political economy, where poor people meet frequent challenges in sustaining themselves, challenges that are exacerbated profoundly by a life-strengthening disease, we may concur with Mauss's idea that, 'Gifts to humans and to the gods [in this case ancestral shades] also serve the purpose of buying peace between them both' (*ibid*: 17). There are many ways in which ritual is held up against an imperfect world, attempting to re-stitch or right it. Ritual is often experienced as preparing for better futures in which the inadequacies of everyday life, its disappointments, sufferings and shortcomings may be overcome. The staging of ideals of care in gift exchange is held up defiantly in the face of the realities of social life, in which we may fail to care for one another, or in which continuity of care between generations may be blocked through infertility and death.

Conclusion

I wish to briefly allude to some philosophical ideas concerning love in the work of Julia Kristeva and Emmanuel Levinas that may have relevance to the tale of love I have told. In their work, love, in its most open form, is linked to renewal and rebirth for the lovers concerned, prior to any procreation. Kristeva (1987:4), for example, writes that love is: 'capable of transforming an error into a renewal – remodeling, remaking, reviving a body, a mentality, a life. Or even two.' And that the pain it inflicts 'bears witness to the experience of having been able to exist for, through and with another in mind.'

For Levinas (1989:49), Eros does not imply the fusing of one person with another, or a sense of completing an alienated self through love, as was, for example, posited in aspects of Greek Philosophy.[46] Rather the pathos of love for Levinas is that it preserves alterity, 'an insurmountable duality of beings.' The person one loves withdraws into their own mystery. The expansive qualities of desire, and of touch, suggest an open future for lovers.[47] In being surprised and reshaped within the throws of love, lovers enter a form of communication associated with fecundity. Levinas is, therefore, at pains to convey

that Eros, as communication, differs from possession, power, and knowledge. Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's relationship, in its unfolding, may be said to have likewise generated its own fecundities in relation to the emergence of mutual respect and admiration.

Ntombikayise once showed me a photograph of herself and Njabulo captured in a stylized moment at their wedding reception. In it she held a cooked chicken-leg up to Njabulo's mouth and he simultaneously held a spoon of beetroot salad to hers. Ntombikayise and Njabulo open their mouths to receive the food given, each to the other. To my mind, the photograph captures a staged moment of equivalence, symbolic of the importance of mutual nurturance and care. The love between Ntombikayise and Njabulo, in many ways has lived up to an ongoing exchange, one in which both persons have been reshaped and renewed in relationship with one another.

The account I have given of Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's relationship, however, neither implies seamless transformation within the presence of death, nor an easy accommodation of the challenging effects of illness. The ways in which death, possible infertility, and disease may work against what is life-giving, particularly in relation to the longing for children, was for them an irresolvable paradox. It was as if the illness became an unexpected child, requiring constant care and vigilance – a vigilance that called forth bitterness in relation to the absence of children and hence of generational continuity.

At the time of writing, Njabulo's CD4 count had risen from 70 (when he was first tested for HIV) to 500, and Ntombikayise's had decreased slightly from 750 to 705. Ntombikayise's menstrual periods returned. Given the latter fact, and Njabulo's increasing health, they revisited their 'dream (*iphupho*)' of having a child. In spite of her high CD4 count, a doctor placed Ntombikayise on antiretrovirals to protect any potential child from the virus in the event that one was conceived, and to try to lesson the effects of cross-infection of the virus due to the exchange of body fluids in unprotected sexual intercourse.

The presence of HIV/AIDS raises many difficulties in relation to fertility, the social insistence on procreation within marriage, and the wished for continuity of generations. Endemic ill-health becomes folded into processes of conception, whether through the effects of an early beginning to ARV treatment, or in increasing the strength

of the virus in HIV positive partners, if sex is unprotected, or in the possibility of passing on the virus to an unborn child. Ntombikayise's and Njabulo's story may be envisaged as one which extends ideas of lack of protection from individual medical risk to that which encompasses social risk: both forms of 'unprotection' that rub up against one another in irresolvable ways. There is lack of protection in relation to disease in not using a condom whilst making love. There is the potential lack of social recognition and sanction in not having children with an attendant withdrawal of ancestral recognition. Yet in the midst of such difficulties, facing ill-health squarely led to a quality of relationship for Ntombikayise and Njabulo that continues to delight both themselves and others. In appearing in public together, they opened a new social space in which, without their having set out to do so, they had become activists.

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[1] Several factors, including migrancy, declining rates of employment, the financial cost of marriage, and change in gender relations have contributed to the decline of marriage in South Africa and in KwaZulu-Natal over several decades. See, for example, Eleanor Preston-Whyte (1978) for an account of declining marriage in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1970s. In relation to women choosing to remain unmarried while bringing up their children, see Eleanor Preston-Whyte (1978) and Mark Hunter (2005:216). According to the South African Census of 2001, only 28 percent of women in South Africa aged fifteen or older were married. Historically early patterns of labour migrancy and subsequent apartheid labour laws and influx control regulations separated spouses and children from their parents, laying the foundation for a decline in marriage. In more recent times, changing patterns of employment have both enabled some, mostly urban women and their children, an increasing degree of independence from men, whilst diminishing, in many instances, men's abilities to take on the role of major bread-winners in long-term relationships.[1] Today, half of all households in the rural areas of South Africa are *de facto* headed by women (South African Demographic Household Survey (SADHS), 1998). In a context of high unemployment, the cost of *ilobolo* (bridewealth) becomes increasingly difficult to bear. Cohabitation of younger African men and women in their twenties has become more common with the statistical proportion of marriages increasing with age (SADHS 1998). Once men and women reach their mid-thirties, the proportion of people married increases to 58 percent (SADHS 1998). In relation to the overall impact of increasing unemployment on young men and women in KwaZulu-Natal and the formation of intimate relationships, see Hunter (2007). The overwhelming preponderance of gender-violence has adversely affected sexual relationships. See, for example Jewkes *et al* (1999), Walker *et al* (2004) and Wood *et al* (1998).

[2] John Borneman (1996:215), for example, has shown how marriage in much foundational anthropological literature (see, for example, Radcliffe-Brown, 1950 and Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1969 [1949]) was associated with the 'ordered' continuation of social life and was ubiquitously perceived as the 'regulative ideal of human societies'. Yet, in so far as marriage is related to the exclusion and marginalisation of people considered from a hetero-normative point of view as 'anomalous', marriage is linked to various forms of death, to privilege, to exclusion and to abjection. Borneman further points to how sex and desire have been excluded from most accounts of marriage, obscuring sexuality across the boundaries of marriage and stigmatizing sexual life outside of marriage (Borneman 1996: 220-221). See Gilman (1998:22-23) for the misleading ways in which marriage and purity have been associated with one another in literature. He points out that 'love, fantasy, trust and belief in marriage' are not a prophylaxis for disease.

[3] The ways HIV/AIDS has disrupted threads of intimacy and social relationships remains the theme of Chapter One. During the course of research, responses to the discovery of an HIV positive status in one or

both partners in relationship often led to the dissolution of the relationship if the partners were young, to secrecy and an unwillingness to disclose in more long-term relationships, or to acrimonious accusations and the pursuit of other relationships sometimes returning to the primary relationship.

[4] In considering Eros, I draw briefly on the work of Kristeva (1987) and Levinas (1989 [1987]). See Berger (2005) for an account of the lack of attention to sexual desire in prevention work. He explores the hetero-normative exclusion of sex outside the parameters of marriage, what he calls 'dirty' sex. He insists on departing from stereotypical conceptions of a ubiquitous vulnerability of young women, for example, and in foregrounding agency in sexual encounters. See also Carole Vance (1997) in relation to the coupling of pleasure and danger in sexual relations.

[5] Many people in Okhahlamba insisted that it was appropriate to use condoms with girlfriends but not with a wife.

[6] Deceased relatives who had been inaugurated as ancestral shades amongst many people whom I knew in Okhahlamba were important presences in the lives of the living. They were seen to intervene in their descendents' lives through helping them to solve problems and by inflicting ill health when relations in the family were not harmonious. Ancestral shades also played an important role in fertility and in sex itself, making lovers desirous of one another and helping to bring together bodily fluids that would form a child in a mother's womb.

[7] Ntombikayise was one of an initial group of 77 women, including one man in Okhahlamba who visited the ill in their homesteads, and who provided relatives with information in relation to the clinic and hospitals. They taught relatives practical methods of providing care for family members who were extremely ill. They often played a mediatory role between medical institutions and family members, and worked as 'translators' between worlds that were not always transparent to one another.

[8] *Isicathamiya* is a popular performance genre made up of songs of a topical nature and a particular dance style. See footnote 15 for a fuller description.

[9] *Abakhongi*, party sent by the groom to negotiate marriage (Doke *et al*, 1999: 402).

[10] Krige **(1933:130)** refers to the way in which the colour of the initial beast was often announced by an *umkhongi* in marriage negotiations in the early part of the 20th century. She names it '*eyokumemeza* (the one to call out by)'.

[11] The delightful effects of simply calling out the name of her husband were evident in the proud way in which Ntombikayise related his full name.

[12] The phrase, 'I want you to cook for me and for my mother' is used in courting banter even by young boys.

[13] 'Robot' is the South African term for a traffic light, and Kentucky refers to the fast-food outlet, Kentucky Fried Chicken.

[14] The term used for accepting someone as a lover is *ukuqoma*. Younger girls in some parts of Okhahlamba indicate their choice of a lover through a gift of beads given to a young man the girl has chosen by an older girl, *iqhikiza* who mediates her courtship.

[15] *Ingoma yobusuku*, night song is also known as *isicathamiya*, a particular genre of singing and dancing devised by Zulu migrant workers who often had to practice at night, and who restricted the volume and scope of their movements so as not to disturb others. The term *isicathamiya* literally means to tread softly like a cat, and perfectly captures the muted and drawn-in energy of this style of performance. Feet and hand movements are delicate and contained in contrast to the overt strength and power of other forms of Zulu dance. The songs are often topical in nature. For an exploration of contemporary *isicathamiya* performance

around HIV/AIDS, see Liz Gunner (2003, 2005). See also Veit Erlmann (1996) for an exploration of the development of the genre.

[16] Amongst families in Okhahlamba, infertility is rarely attributed to a man. If there are difficulties in having a child, it is in most cases presumed that the woman 'is to blame'.

[17] It is not unusual for children born outside of a marriage to remain with their maternal grandparents after their mother has married.

[18] It is important to note that at the time of our conversations Njabulo's illness no antiretroviral treatment was available in Okhahlamba through the state system.

[19] See Kristeva (1987) for a discussion of the horror attached to abjection and the pollution attached to certain body fluids. See Chapter One for an account of the fear attached to the metamorphoses of the body in undergoing AIDS – a disintegration of the body from solid flesh to one leaning towards the fluid in its uncontrollable voiding of what is ingested through diarrhoea and vomiting.

[20] Fiona Scorgie *et al* (2006) through discussion and interviews with a range of rural women in Centocow, KwaZulu-Natal, as well as at an urban site in Durban have suggested a range of vaginal practices in which herbal and commercial substances are used to 'tighten' and 'dry' a woman's vagina, and in which other substances are used for aphrodisiacal purposes. The use of substances in the latter way is also linked to 'love magic' in which women seek to secure their relationships and the interest of their men. As such, the above practices indicate the insecurities women and girls experience in relationships with men. For further literature on vaginal practices, including 'dry sex' in South Africa see, for example, Belkinska *et al* (1999); Morar & Ramjee (1997); Morar & Abdool Karim (1998); Myer *et al* (2005). For anthropological literature on the same topic, see Leclerc-Madlala (2002); Scorgie (2004).

[21] For the role of both a man and a woman's shades in creating desire, in the act of sex and in conception, see Bergland (1976: 94ff) In relation to the latter points see Robert Thornton's work (2003).

[22] To understand the importance of Njabulo's response to Ntombikayise, I will briefly contrast it to others. Younger people, in returning home from Johannesburg in extremely bad health, were often deserted by their lovers. Sometimes a known girlfriend or boyfriend would not even attend the funeral of their former partner. In the case of married couples, one or both partners often chose not to disclose their status to the other, and worried that they had caused the illness in the other. Sometimes women silently nursed their husbands to their deaths without the virus ever being mentioned. Husbands, when seeing the decline of a wife, sometimes took up more permanently with a lover or girlfriend.

[23] It was common for brides to be blamed for bringing HIV/AIDS into their husband's families, just as it was common for women marrying into a patrilineage to be blamed for witchcraft within the lineage. Women, although leaving their natal homes to marry, were never fully integrated into the homes of their husbands and were regarded as strangers within a patrilineage.

[24] See Henderson (2004:50-51) for an account of the association of women with pollution in the local context. See also, Ngubane (1977:78-79). Other writers have discussed the ways in which pollution is often attributed to women, because of their ability to retain fluids associated with sex and fertility (Scorgie *et al* 2006. See also Leclerc-Madlala 2002.). The way in which menstruation is linked with pollution is explored by Ngubane (1977:79). In the case of Zimbabwe, see Ray *et al* (1996:69).

[25] Withholding a beast from the full number of bride-wealth cattle where a wife has had a child in another relationship is common practice.

[26] Practices of avoidance are referred to as *ukuhlonipha*. See Dowling (1988) and Findlayson (1995) for indepth exploration of linguistic forms of *ukuhlonipha*. See Raum (1973) for a range of avoidance practices among Zulu speaking peoples.

[27] The *umgano* animal must not be killed. It signifies a father's generosity towards and concern for his daughter. In Okhahlamba, the animal is sometimes called '*ukhezo lomntwana*' meaning 'the spoon of the child'. When grown, the heifer provides the bride and her children with milk, and must not be confused with the 'goat of the spoon (*imbuzi yokhezo*)'(Krige, 1933:394). The latter animal is given to the bride by her husband's family to signify that she has now been sufficiently accepted in her new home and may drink the milk of her husband's cattle. The *umgano* beast is associated with the bride's personal shades. Bergland (1978:207- 208) refers to the same animal as '*isigodo*' (tree stump on which ancestors come to rest), maintaining that there are many names for it, including *umbeka*, as does Krige (1933:392). The *isigodo* may be one of two or three cattle, the *ukwendisa* cattle, that accompany the bride to her new home as a gift from her father, and that facilitate communication with the shades of her own lineage (*Ibid*: 206), and between the shades of her own and her husband's lineage. Whereas the other two cattle are slaughtered when the bride arrives at the groom's homestead, the *isigodo*, or the *umgano* beast lives out its natural life in the husband's homestead, providing comfort and a direct link with the shades of the bride's former home. See Krige's description (1933:391) of the *ukwendisa* cattle taken from the bride's to the groom's home. See Braadtvedt, (1927) for an extensive exploration of 'customary' marriage amongst Zulu speakers.

[28] Ntombikayise was angry at the way in which herbal medicines no longer helped Njabulo.

[29] In Okhahlamba, a lift in another person's car to a hospital, clinic, or healer usually cost R100 at the time of the research.

[30] Njabulo uses the phrase, 'child of a person' to refer to Ntombikayise. It is an expression in isiZulu similar in weight to the English, 'human being'.

[31] In contrast to Levinas (1988 [1987]: 40-42), Heidegger's ([1953]1996:239, 261ff) notion of being encompasses death, in that 'death makes possible all other possibilities'. For Heidegger, being leans towards death, as if death may be comprehended and faced. For Heidegger, incorporating an 'understanding' of death into being constitutes supreme lucidity and virility, a rounded completion of life.

[32] Sevenhuijsen (1998), Sevenhuijsen *et al* (2003) and Tronto (1995, 1993) have written extensively on issues to do with care and gender, suggesting that nation-states need to take responsibility for aspects of care. Welfare policies that depend on voluntarism, for example, take the availability of women to provide care and to extend the number of persons to whom they administer care, for granted. Both the invisibility of care, and hence its seeming unimportance are tied to the fact that women and girls are largely responsible for its provision in society.

[33] Men did not generally attend support groups for people living with AIDS. Although I came to know intimately and individually several men afflicted with the disease over a long period, they preferred to speak of their illness privately and chose not to join support groups. In some public meetings, male leaders raised their concern about wide-scale deaths in their neighbourhoods, but they did not, in my hearing, speak of any first-hand experience of the disease. Five out of six support groups for people living with AIDS that existed in Okhahlamba at the end of the research period were comprised solely of women, often widows, whose husbands had died of AIDS-related illnesses. With encouragement, and with the increasing availability of anti-retroviral treatment, younger women and girls joined support groups. The sixth support group comprised mostly men and was created through the husband of a home-based carer. The home-based carer 'recruited' members for the group through selling beer at her homestead.

[34] Wedding protocol in Okhahlamba required that when an *umkongi* first arrived at a prospective bride's home, he would stand outside the homestead, and when he called out that he wanted to set up negotiations for marriage, he was at first sent away and told to return the next day. At wedding ceremonies, the bride's and the groom's parties tried to outdo one another in their singing and dancing. Physical fights often broke out during marriage celebrations. In relation to the rivalry of respective wedding parties, see Braadvedt (1927: 557), Krige (1936: 138-140); and Samuelson (1928:115).

[35] *Izingcosho*, are described by Doke *et al* (1990:125) as 'pickings'. The word is derived from the verb *cosha*, to pick up with the fingers.

[36] See Bergland (1976:110ff, 199ff, 215, 228ff); Bryant (1949:274-75); Holleman (1940:31-75); Hunter (1979: 52, 190-93, 234); Krige (1933: 120-123,184-188); Ngubane (1977: 47-48, 61-67), Poland, Hammond-Tooke &Voigt (2003). See also Ferguson (1985) for important insights into how the significance of cattle amongst Basotho was not an archaic residue, but was fully integrated into a 'modern' political economy.

[37] See Vilikazi (1965:64) for reference to gifts exchanged in marriage. He refers to the gifts as *izicelo* and *imibondo*.

[38] *Umembeso* refers to a set of gifts and clothing given by the groom to his wife's family during the build-up to a marriage. *Umabo* refers to a set of gifts given by the bride to the groom's people. Krige (1933: 137-138) suggests that the gifts given by the bride to the groom's people at her wedding are important. But she does not explain why this may be so. She lists presents given by the bride as 'mats, baskets, beads etc.' (*ibid*.), 'blankets…beer strainers, brooms etc.' (*ibid*: 152) and 'household utensils' (*ibid*: 122).

[39] Ntombikayise's mother related several stories to me in which the dead insisted on receiving the blanket, pillow and sleeping mat due to them in wedding exchanges. Their insistence had been communicated through repeated dreams, often on the part of the relative who had failed to set the gifts aside for them. The dreams would cease as soon as the person had fulfilled their obligations. Ntombikayise's mother stated that it was more important to give gifts to the dead than to the living, because it was easier to explain to the living the financial difficulties of a family. (Interview: 16 June 2004.) See Vilikazi (1965: 69) for reference to gifts given to ancestral shades during marriage negotiations.

[40] See Ngubane (1977: 66).

[41] See Dieter Reutsch (1998:20), who in an examination of the social life of pots amongst the Mabaso of Msinga in KwaZulu-Natal, reiterates similar points to do with the association between women, earth, fertility and the ancestral shades. Reutsch (1998:37) distinguished between pots in which beer was brewed which often retained their earth colouring, and *izinkamba*, the drinking vessels that were also used to make offerings to the shades at the *umsamo*. The latter vessels were always blackened through reduction firing with cow dung. Their blackened colour was a way of paying respect to the ancestors (See Davidson, 1985: 74-7). Pots in which beer was brewed were also smeared with fresh cow-dung. The inclusion of cow-dung in processes of pottery making and usage 'strengthen[ed] the association between the ancestors and the vessels, as cattle and their by-products [were] mediums through which the living descendents… communicate[d] with their ancestors (1998: 37)'.

[42] At rituals and ordinary occasions, drinking vessels were passed between drinkers, often marking their relative age and status through the order in which the vessel is passed from one person to another. For an in-depth exploration of the ways in which beer drinking consolidates social relationships between neighbours and relatives among Xhosa speakers in the Transkei, see Patrick McAllister (1997: 294ff, 303; 2001). He writes: 'Important abstract social principles, such as locality, neighbourliness, co-operation, sharing and the interdependence of homesteads, are given concrete expression and perpetuated [in the beer drink] (1997: 303).' Beer is also shared between former antagonists in ceremonies of reconciliation. See Krige (1933:59), for example, and Bergland (1976:323-25).

[43] The fire used to burn the offered meat was preferably made with two sticks: a 'male' and a 'female' stick (Reutsch, 1998: 29). As heat was associated with reproduction, the heat produced with the sticks corresponded to sexual intercourse. Heat beneath a pot was always a metaphor for heterosexual sex, as the fire was associated with a man's penis and the pot with the womb of a woman in which a child was moulded by the shades of both parents.

[44] During the course of open-ended interviews, many people in Okhahlamba mentioned the value of making things with their hands, as well as the idea that a person lived through the work of his or her hands. It was particularly hand-crafted objects that were associated with the 'ways of isiZulu' as opposed to 'the ways of the whites' (*isiLungu*).

[45] In Moari law, for example, the legal tie that develops through the exchange of things is 'one between souls, because the thing itself possesses a soul', and 'is of the soul (Mauss 1990: 12)'. Bayly (2003[1986]) writing on cloth in India makes a similar point. She describes how cloth absorbs the substance of the people who make it and who wear it, substances that are both benign and polluting.

[46] See, for example, Plato's *The Symposium* ([1951] 1985: 59-66)where Aristophanes discusses the three sexes (male, female and hermaphroditic) in relation to his amusing theory of circular beings, the original human beings who were made up of two parts (two male parts, two female parts or one male and one female part). From the time Zeus split each circular being into two, the two halves have been seeking one another desirously ever since.

[47] For an exploration of the open-ended, non-goal directed nature of the caress, see Luce Irigaray's (1986) tribute to Emmanuel Levinas in her piece, 'The fecundity of the caress'.