Catherine Burns /Draft paper: please do not cite burnsc@ukzn.ac.za

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Note to the reader:

Since the Conference organised by Prof Andrew Bank and the University of Fort Hare at Hogsback in late June this year, Lynn Thomas of the History Department at the University of Washington and I have worked on a joint paper about the treatment of themes of intimacy and sexuality in both the work of Monica Hunter Wilson and of Isaac Schapera. In July were able to gather new and additional evidence from archival sources in Cape Town and worked on the new paper during a few intense days. Lynn is in Botswana and we have not had a chance to compare notes since then. We are nearly ready to show this to a wider audience and in my opening comments I will indicate where the paper is heading as the comparative issues come to the fore. But I still think it is worthwhile getting a wider airing of this shorter paper from the HAAS seminarians. Thank you in advance.

[1] This image comes from the Conference pamphlet and is courtesy of the University of Cape Town, "Wilson Collection". It is of Monica Hunter in her early 20s at Cambridge University.

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Interest and Emotion: Monica Hunter Wilson, Sex and Love in South African historical prose

"It is awfully good to have a girl to cuddle into these colds nights"

Introduction

Monica Hunter Wilson's imaginative empathy made her one of the most readable and persuasive historical ethnographers of the 20th century.[2] Her own remembrance and experience of the hills and vales of Pondoland and the Eastern Cape followed her through childhood at school in Lovedale, with the Soga children as her class mates, away to high school in a sea-side provincial town, across the continent to a leading British university, and back again to the Eastern Cape, to her doctoral research site. Sustained by letters home and by contact with people from South Africa, she was able to practice the art of writing about missed and longed for place, as she sorted out what it meant to define herself in relation to this natal home whilst away from it. As a correspondent, first from a school in a city of the Cape to her parent's mission station, and then to this home from abroad, Pondoland must have been a central motif. Pondoland, then, was both the place of her birth and the space of her first ethnographic work and published monograph. She shared affinity with place and people in her research intensely, even in comparison to the other influential settler-born ethnographers emerging at the same time, and whose impact on the region's intellectual history and international audiences was, and remains, formidable.

Influential anthropologists working in or educated in the early 20th century from South Africa included Henri Junod; Winifred Hoernlé; Hilda Bremer Kuper; Werner Eiselen; Meyer Fortes; Max Gluckman; Eileen Jensen Krige; Ellen Hellman; Isaac Schapera, and a little later Archie Mafeje, Iona and Philip Mayer, David Hammond-Tooke and Harriet

[2] This paper is a work in progress and is based largely on Monica Hunter's *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* ([First published 1936]; 1961; Oxford: Oxford University press, International African Institute). In a later version of the more developed paper, and depending on insights and criticism, I plan to refer to her writing and research in other parts of east central and southern Africa. Not all citations are full yet.

Ngubane. In Hunter Wilson's work, more tellingly than in the work of her peers, and especially in her work on sexuality; livelihoods; cosmology; child rearing, medicine and birthing, the interest and emotion in Hunter Wilson's prose is never fully disguised and, when it emerges, it is most compelling.

In my first readings of her work I saw this deeply engaged rendering of sexual life and intimacy as unintentional. But re-readings have suggested to me that her interest and emotion is deployed intentionally as well. In this paper, a work in progress that is sketchy and tentative in places, I will try to substantiate this view. After a discussion of the place of sexuality in some of her writing, and then a section on Hunter Wilson's work in relation to peer work and subsequent analysis of sexuality in the time of HIV/AIDS, I will return to this theme and argue that the way her voice emerges, in the first monograph, has resonated with enduring force in South African historical writing. Her impact was felt in the revisionist school of the 1980s but work of newer groups of Southern African historians, coming into academic posts in the later 1990s and 2000s, has returned to her analysis for inspiration at a time of instrumentalist and arid sexual writing and insight. Her voice has lent writing on sexuality, by historians and historically-inclined sociologists, geographers and anthropologists, a richer engagement with sexual worth and power in comparison to studies schooled outside of a tradition enriched by her prose and the insights it carried.

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Winter nights bring to people a layer of desire for intimate contact and tactile communication different to the thirst generated in steaming humid nights of summer, with warm winds urging movement and drawing people, especially young people, into the gloaming, outside the walls of stifling enclosures. I make this statement as if any reader could understand what I mean. Hunter Wilson wrote often as if any thinking and feeling person could empathise with the subjects of her research. She wrote in other voices as well. Hunter Wilson did, along with her peers, employ the "we" of a presumed western educated, and usually white, readership of anthropology at the time, but she did so anxiously and with greater evident tension in her prose than social analysts such as Hellman or Krige. Like Schapera, Hunter Wilson spent a great deal of her research time reading published and unpublished works by contemporary African commentators and writers and she no doubt hoped and presumed that educated readers across a range of backgrounds would pick up her monograph.[3] Hunter Wilson left less to presumption in her writing than her peers, and contemplated the complexity of meaning and intention as a central theme of her acts of interpretation.

In her first book's "Acknowledgements" she first thanks her professor at Cambridge; then her friends and hosts in Eastern Pondoland—from chiefs to trading store-keepers; next the University of the Witwatersrand based anthropologist, Hoernlé and then Malinowski, writing:

> Professor Malinowski, through his books, seminar, and personal contact, has set for me, as for many others, a standard of research which although unattainable for most of us, incites to further effort in the field, and inspires to constant struggle to get beyond mere description to the analysis of Institutions. I am very grateful to him.[4]

While constantly aware of complexities in translation and intelligibility she was also able

[3] Monica Hunter *Reaction to Conquest.* See "Tendencies" 'What Bantu think about it', p. 554, also see footnote 1 on that page.

[4] Monica Hunter *Reaction to Conquest*, "Acknowledgements", p. xviii. This paper is based largely on *Reaction to Conques*t, although in a later version of the paper I plan to refer to her writing and research in other parts of east central and southern Africa.

to suggest a common humanism in sexual and other arenas. In this voice she was radical for her time and place. Difficulty in translation and technical skill is centred in her "*Method of Work*". Here she writes:

> As the daughter of missionaries born and brought up in Lovedale, a missionary institution, I had, before beginning field work, friends among educated Bantu, and some knowledge of Bantu life. I was not fluent in Xhosa when I began work, and at the first store was greatly helped by my host, who was skilful interpreter. As time when on I began to speak easily and made my notes partly in the vernacular. In translating these notes, and texts written by Geza [Michael Geza her research assistant for the second phase of her field work], I have found difficulty. Language and culture are interdependent and there is inevitably great difficulty in an attempt to describe on culture in the language of another. Bantu culture is widely different from European culture, and again and again one is confronted with the impossibility of rendering exactly in English a concept foreign to our culture. The language relating to magic, or to the ancestor cult, for example, cannot be translated into English.[5]

After evoking the difficulty in translating conceptual and contextual meaning between "eating" and its meaning "to an Englishman" and "a Pondo" for whom *ukudla* carries complex thickets of association, she proceeds:

> If we take the example of a more complicated action such as "to make love", the meaning in the two cultures is more widely different.

I do not think it an accident that she evokes love, and sexual love, so near the start of this piece of extended writing. Deploying, sometimes virtually simultaneously, relativistic and universalistic stances throughout her book, she addresses the reader as an expert, like her, on all humanity's ingredients. This "expert" is an Englishman, and even as she

[5] Hunter *Reaction to Conquest* "Introductory", p 12. Comments in square brackets are my own.

evoked this expert there is a consciously implied and immediate distancing. The reader knows she is not a man; she is not English—at least not seen as such in England, a place to which she must returned as a colonial-born subject to defend this work. The reader knows if they care to find out, that she is person without the vote in the Cape where she was born, a place where few black men in the early 1930s were entitled to the franchise at the time, but no white women. In *this* prose voice she anticipates the reader's self-knowledge about sexual, economic and other drives. Although as an unmarried Christian young white settler woman in Africa (Hunter Wilson tells us this in the first 12 pages) the female author is not supposed "to know" about these drives, yet the author, like the reader, knows. The reader could stop and think about this then and now, if they so chose. If they did the tension in this prose form would be heightened.

In another oft-used form of address Hunter Wilson treats the reader as a curious generalist, but also a specifically knowledge-less outsider, who needs detailed and complex descriptions and analytical directions to "begin to understand but imperfectly forever" this Pondoland based other. With this voice Hunter Wilson is the expert and yet neither she, nor the reader, will "ever really know" another "culture".

At the same time the common place; the mutual; the dialogical is also evoked throughout the book. This is particularly so around love for kin, the value and worth in the relishing of friendship, and the energy and potential embedded in the sexuality of young people all around her in the 1930s. In these sections of the text Hunter Wilson evokes shared human yearnings and experience in memorable phrases and sentences throughout this study of Pondoland.

In her mid 1930s evocation of winter love she wrote:

> One over-hears such remarks as, "It is awfully good to have a girl to cuddle into these colds nights," from boys of twelve. By 14 boys are complete young bloods, cutting their hair in fancy patterns, sporting snuff spoons, and wearing their sweathearts' beads. Girls of 12 are growing their hair and getting fussy about

> beads and braided skirts. [6]

And we have the evocative phrase from the same opening section of the chapter titled *Pre-marital Sexual Experience*, "the couple lie in each other's arms":

> Children are from an early age aware of the facts of sex ... The young people of one small local district - perhaps all those who live on one ridge - gather in the evening in a secluded spot or in a deserted hut. They dance and sing, then pair off to sleep together. The couple lie in each other's arms, but the hymen of the girl must not be ruptured ... It is certain that both boys and girls do *ukumetsha*[7]

In my experience as teacher of history and gender studies I have found that audiences of many forms in South Africa are amazed that these kinds of texts, rich in the acceptance of sexual passion and the energy of youthful love, were written in the 1930s. There is a wide spread popular discourse, circulated and elaborated upon in AIDS course materials, thousands of curricula and programmes and interventions and public health papers, that expressive sexual consciousness and experience in young people is something new, part of our post-1960s world in Southern Africa in general and a centre piece only with the arrival of HIV/AIDS.

In the past few years us African-based people have come to absorb an increasing array of messages about sexuality, contraception and the hazards of what is termed unsafe sexual practices from our radios, our newspapers, our TV sets and in our communities—however constructed as such. We have also all heard people, often elderly folk and parents of teenagers, but also Ministers of Cabinet and party political officials, muttering angrily about the promiscuousness of 'today's youth'. Many South Africans, especially it seems women, tell researchers, talk show hosts, and magazines that they feel liberated by the greater openness and detail of readily available sex information we are all receiving

[6] Hunter *Reaction to Conquest,* p. 180.
[7] P. M Hunter *Reaction* p. 180.

these days.[8] In all of these discussions and debates, discourses both popular, and in many cases academic, do a very great disservice to knowledge by cultivating and building a view of "the modern" as concerned with sex, sexual pleasure, and the pitfalls and dangers associated with sexual practice, as opposed to something else, constructed through these dichotomies as "the traditional", a know-nothing space, in which pain and pleasure were suppressed by naiveté.

Monica Hunter Wilson and her peers left a rich written record of Southern African social formations studied in the 1920s to 1970s, including many Ngami-, Sotho- and Tswana-speaking regions. In their work informants were always able to share and communicate their knowledge of sex and sexual practices very frankly. The living memory, as well as oral histories, of these informants, carried well back into the 19th century. All the monographs of this time-period in Southern Africa share certain key features in their treatments of sex. Hunter Wilson as well as Schapera and their peers no doubt learned a great deal useful to themselves in the possibilities and richness of alternate expressions of sexuality from their field work. They write that sexual practices and teachings were widely disseminated and a part of every day life. Teachings and practices were neither invitations to 'free sex' or sexual activity without restriction. Missionary and settler administrative mis-understandings of the healthful and socially rich sexual lives of the indigenous people of Southern Africa are very hard to understand in commonsensical terms today, given the clear and unequivocal explanations that emerge from the turn of the century work of Junod –himself a missionary—through and all the way through the 1970s.[9] When missionaries, law makers, and officials read licentiousness and savagely into sexual sophistication, today's 21st century readers are able to draw on the last 30 years of excellent work on sexual history, and the concomitant critical and theoretical ramifications of this. Based on social and intellectual histories of the 18th and 19th century west, and their elaboration and re-invention through colonial experience, Foucault's elucidations, as well as the work of many of his respectful critics such as Stoler, have

[8] Cite D. Posel, G. Reid and L. Walker here and the editions that followed from the 2003 University of the Witwatersrand W.I.S.E.R based *Sex and Secrecy Conference.*

[9] H. Junod *Life of a South African Tribe,* Volume 1 and 2, (New York: University books, [revised edition 1927] 1962).

helped us to help us understand the era of powerful repressive urges and their polymorphous productions.[10] Both Victorian European and 19th century South East Africa sexual practices were rule-bound. But while rules, constraint and self-control were directed towards anticipated expressions of sexual activity on the part of young people in southern Africa, with this sexuality seen as an appropriate subject for education, along with many other aspects of physical and social maturation, Victorian counter parts were learning to find guilt and self loathing "sexual". The damage and pain this left in its wake is perhaps the basis for much 20th and even 21st century (sexual) therapeutics.

Crucial aspects of this history of sexual practice and knowledge, added to by reconstructions from oral testimony, newspapers, health-records, and archival information, emerge from the writings of Hunter Wilson and her anthropologist peers. Consider these three statements about sex and sexual practice from the past:

> There is no great reticence before children on matters of sex, and Zulu children at an early age not only know a good deal about sex, but themselves indulge in playful sexual intercourse ... After a period of about three months any young man who has been accepted may come to the *amaqhikiza* [older girls who already have sweethearts] and ask for their permission to *hlobonga,* or to have external sexual intercourse with his sweetheart *ukucela intombi*.[11]
>
> When discussing with *Kgatla* ... I was continually struck by the open importance they attached to the sexual aspect. They have very little prudery in matters of this kind ... sexual behaviour in itself is not a topic that must be veiled in deliberate obscurity ... sex is considered a normal factor in human life ... from an early age children are familiar with the nature of copulation, and much of their play consists of games with a definitely sexual character ... very few *Kgatla* enter marriage with

[10] Cite M Foucault, A Stoler, J Weeks, D Posel, and work on contraception by myself and S Klausen as well as others here.

[11] Eileen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus,* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter., 1936), pp 78; 105 Krige here draws her language from 's original monograph. I think "sweathearting" is a Hunter Wilson phrase and would welcome any comments on this.

> no sexual experience at all.[12]
>
> All Xhosa, including Christians, regard sexual satisfaction as a normal requirement of every adult, whether married, unmarried, or widowed. Sexual contacts (they feel) have to be regulated not because they are intrinsically evil or dangerous, but in order to avoid infringements of existing rights. [13]

Why were these four anthropologists, and they are amongst a much larger peer group - of Hunter Wilson, Krige, Schapera, I. Mayer and P. Mayer – so interested in African women and men's ideas about sexuality and youth when they conducted their research? None of them wrote about sex and sexuality in their works with the crude or distancing manner available to them in settler or metropolitan discourses. The sexual personalities of the people they were writing about were spoken of respectfully, and in Hunter Wilson's case perhaps it is not too far fetched to suggest, with some yearning. The examples reproduced above form a small portion of the detailed information contained in the work of these academics, and indeed the book by Schapera, *Married Life in An African Tribe*, is one of the most careful and detailed studies of its kind. The evidence contained in these works is substantial and a reading of these accounts, along with other smaller papers written at the time, allows us to extract a number of key generalisations about youthful sexual practices. As Guy has indicated in his study of precolonial Zulu homestead life, people's ideas about appropriate sexual expression in Zulu society were similar to their Nguni peers but starkly different to, for example, the expected sexual thrall found in silence and cover experienced in proper mission and settler Victorian English homes.[14] Guy stresses that control of fertility (or conception, followed by pregnancy and birth) was highly regulated in Nguni society. In the 2000s popular discourses confuse 'fertility control' with 'sexual control'. This seems to be the legacy inherited from a time when western

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[12] Isaac Schapera, *Married Life in an African Tribe*, (New York: Sheridan House, 1941), pp. 180-181.

[13] I. Mayer & P. Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen*, (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, [1961] 1974), p. 253.

[14] Jeff Guy 'Gender oppression in Southern Africa's precapitalist societies' in C Walker (ed) *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (Cape Town: David Philip).

contraception was not very reliable. And when we inspect the question more deeply, we see that more than a hundred years ago, Nguni and other peoples in Southern Africa clearly separated these two aspects of human sexuality. Early records indicate that in precolonial Southern Africa, young people were educated from a very young age according to certain principles. Seldom did parents tell children about their changing bodies or about sexual intercourse. These tasks were in the hands of older relatives and women and men in the age set just above the inductees. Young men and women were drawn into the world of sexual awareness through special ceremonies marking off their childhood stage. As a consequence of new sexual permission (which involved choosing sweethearts and exchanging gifts, often under the direction of older siblings), young adults were expected to exercise sexual control and restraint. They were instructed in how to do so as part of their life training. Sex between the thighs of the woman partner, rubbing, fondling, caressing and other forms of sexual play were allowed and privacy was accorded these experiences by adults. At the same time, older women often checked the sexual organs of young women to ensure that full penetrative intercourse was not taking place. In cases when semen seeped into the vagina, or when full intercourse did occur, resulting in conception and pregnancy, young men and women were held strictly accountable for their actions. In some Southern African societies, they could face harsh penalties and social ostracism, and all efforts were made to secure a marriage between the two parties. Often males would have to work off punishments through cattle payments and labour services. The aim was not to punish young people for enjoying sexual expression, but to ensure the regulation of the birth. Children needed to be born into households where their future security had been assured via complex marriage arrangements. One last generalisation emerges from the writing of late 19th and early 20th century observers of African rural life: despite regional variations, all Southern African societies (as with most in the pre-industrial world) regarded children, and thus the reproductive work of women, as central ingredients stitching the fabric of society and community together. In children rested the future of lineages, and the labour of children-become-adults underpinned the wealth of homesteaders. At the start of this century -- despite the effects of colonial wars, the impact of Christian teachings and the effects of industrialisation and land dispossession -- most rural-based black South Africans continued to practice local forms of fertility control and maintained precolonial ideas

about sexual expression. Thus the work of early 20th century anthropologists provides clues about a rich history of sexual expression in Southern Africa

To understand why the small group of South African-born and British educated researchers set out to document all that they could about sex and sexuality in African communities in the early decades of this century, we have to step back and appreciate a broader context.

An international movement concerned with providing cheap forms of contraception to women as a form of fertility control, reached a high fever pitch of activity in the 1930s.[15] White South African born researchers and anthropologists were aware of this movement, and some of them took part in a project aimed at spreading the perceived benefits of these programmes to South Africa. During the last decades of the 19th century, new ideas about contraception and contraceptive knowledge spread around the world, helped along by new postal services, by the increasing literacy of adults in Europe, India, the then USSR, some parts of the Pacific and North America, by movements of women who were struggling for better control over their reproduction and pregnancies, and by new methods of fertility control. For as long as humans have recorded their history (orally and in written forms), we know that they have practiced many different forms of fertility control. These have ranged from different methods of love-making, different patterns of marriage and courtship, and physical methods such as sustained breast- feeding and child spacing. Humans have also practiced methods of contraception, including the use of douches, swabs and liquids introduced into the vagina; herbs and cloths to prevent free passage of sperm; and abortificants to end pregnancies.

But before the 20th century, most of these practices and techniques were locally known, passed on mainly among friends and families - particularly by women - and were

[15] See the work of Linda Gordon on the history of these hormonal contraceptives, and the progressive and conservative political agendas that coalesced around these new technologies: L. Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: Birth Control in America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) and my own work and that of Klausen on birth control and its history in South Africa. See C Burns "Controlling Birth: Johannesburg, 1920-1960" *South African Historical Journal* 50 (2004), pp/ 170-198.

intertwined with local spiritual beliefs and practices. In many parts of the world after the 1800s, women healers, midwives and herbalists began to lose ground to professionally trained doctors and scientists - most of them men from universities and colleges that excluded women students. At the same time, social conditions and people's life and work patterns were changing dramatically. In the west, people were migrating to industrial cities and into new forms of paid farm-work. In colonised countries in Asia, South America and Africa, these new technologies and ideas about health and the human body were brought along with industrially produced farm tools, new work ethics and ideas about property ownership, along with guns and force and, of course, along with the religions of the settlers' and colonists' home countries - in South Africa's case, Christianity. In South Africa, the effects of new ideas and practices in the north were soon felt. After the 1880s, as cities such as Johannesburg sprang into existence, and as older cities such as East London, Durban and Cape Town developed, people from all over the sub-continent were drawn into the new forms of social and material life. In South Africa - as elsewhere in the world - people responded to wage labour, land dispossession and new forms of household arrangements, such as labour migrancy, by attempting to shape changes around them to their best advantage. Most of South Africa's peoples had to face these changes in the context of the racist and sexist legislation of the new South African capitalist state. After Union in 1910, the state increasingly undermined any assertion of equal rights or access on the part of black people. Thus our current understanding of the impact of ideas about sexuality region has to be seen in the light of these broader forces shaping the regional past. By the 1930s, when Monica Hunter Wilson set out to undertake her research, public health authorities, Christian missionaries and ministers, doctors, employers and many South African women and men, both black and white, were alarmed at what they saw as a new 'social threat'. Along with urban living and waged employment there emerged what people at the time called the 'social diseases' or venereal diseases (STDs) and the pregnancies of 'unwed' women. Both were seen to be caused by women with 'lax morals' and by the permissiveness of modern society. Although men were regarded as being partly to blame for the crisis, women were seen as the solution, if only they could be 'correctly' educated and trained. Ideas about women as the source of STDs, and policies which targeted women exclusively had their roots in laws passed in Europe and some of its colonies in the latter decades of the 19th

century. The so- called 'Contagious Diseases Acts' had given local police powers to detain women suspected of being infected with venereal diseases for long periods of time. Public reaction to these Acts brought many women into public life for the first time in Europe. Many historians argue that women's opposition to these Acts was fundamental to the international 'Votes For Women' movement. In South Africa by the 1930s, it was no longer politically possible to 'lock up' women suspected by male police of being 'infected'. Nevertheless, male politicians, educators, officials and religious leaders continued to speak of women as if they were 'to blame' for sexual promiscuity and STDs and they continued to call for women to be 'correctly trained'. It is important to recall just what people in authority at the time regarded as 'correct training'. Most Christian churches then advocated that the only moral form of sexual expression or pleasure was to be found within heterosexual marriage, and was designed for the primary purpose of conceiving children. Churches in South Africa had for over 100 years assiduously promoted this approach to human sexuality, and by the early decades of this century, very few churches considered any other position to be of moral worth. Missionaries were concerned with ridding African communities of practices they considered 'heathen' - especially initiation schools which emphasised sexual education of young adults. Local health officials, concerned about what they called 'sex hygiene', were mainly worried about poor, white women. They quietly began to support contraception clinics for married women, trying to make sure that conservative religious institutions did not mistake their programmes as supportive of sexual promiscuity.

The health experts and social reformers who organised South African campaigns were drawn from an uneasy alliance of progressive and profoundly reactionary actors. In the early decades of this century, people who supported sexuality education and contraception did so for many different reasons. Some reformers were single African women such as Sibusisiwe Makanya[16]; some were working-class women themselves, or middle-class women who had taken up the cause for other women. They believed that women's knowledge of their sexual organs and control of their fertility -- using what were

[16] Umaheni Khan **"**A critical study of the life of Sibusisiwe Makanya and her work as educator and social worker in the Umbumbulu district of Natal, 1894- 1971" (University of Natal: Unpublished Masters Thesis 1995).

seen as the latest scientific methods -- would help to liberate women, and provide them with new choices. Other people, and this included many people in the South African Government, saw contraception and sex education as a means of 'population control': getting rid of the least productive members of society (from their point of view) and this usually meant the poor and the unhealthy. Pseudo-scientific terms used at the time, and associated with these views, included words such as 'eugenics' - or the control of types of people born through artificial means and 'race welfare'. In South Africa and in many other sites on earth at the time these schemes came to mean attempting to 'control' the numbers of subjects born, on the part of elites and ruling classes.

Many black people in South Africa, as I have shown elsewhere, regarded cities in South Africa, as 'sites of promiscuity'. Black social workers and religious leaders in the 1930a wrote and spoke out against what they called the 'collapse' of morality among black youth as much as did white officials. By the turn of the century, many educated black women and men were converts to Christianity, and along with their learning about scripture, didactic messages about the 'evils' of premarital or homoerotic or self pleasuring sex, polygamy and so on were imparted. One of the most actively targeted aspects of missionaries' work was their condemnation of youthful and adolescent sexual practices. Far from regarding sexual desire in young people as healthy, worthy and in need of education and support, most Christian ministers and missionaries taught that all sexual expression outside of marriage was sinful. Indeed in East London, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban, self-help societies such as the 'Bantu Purity League' were started by black women to help strengthen the moral convictions of black Christian converts, and women formed prayer groups, or *manyanos*, to pray for guidance in keeping their sons, but especially their daughters, free from sexual desire or sexual experience until marriage.[17] If, as Jeffrey Weeks argues, 'sex ... has been a transmission belt for wider social anxieties[18]', then it makes sense that the context of colonial conquest, massive economic and social change, urban migration and the impoverishment of the rural areas, communities in Southern Africa experienced great changes in the most

[17] Here site Umehani Khan; Burns; and Gaitskell.
[18] Jeffrey Weeks *Sexuality and its discontents: meanings, myth & modern sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1985), p. 16.

intimate areas of their lives. In other words, Weeks argues that the history of ideas about sex and different sexual practices has been as important a part of the bigger stories of our histories as wars of conquest and migrations of people.

In South Africa in the early 1930s, authorities began commissioning what they called 'expert opinion' on the urbanisation of Africans, focusing on women in particular. The reports they received were not always written by people who were racist or government supporters. Indeed, some of the most influential reports were written with the help of prominent black men and women. At the same time, academics and anthropologists were becoming interested in these questions too, as they seemed to provide answers to great issues of the day. In the debates which followed, people such as Charlotte Maxeke (a social worker based in Johannesburg), Sibusisiwe Makanya (based near Durban) and Dr A. B. Xuma (an emerging leader of the African National Congress, medical doctor and state official as Medical Officer of Health), presented their views on sexual problems in form and style very similar to the anthropologists mentioned at the start of this article.[19]

Academics such as Hunter Wilson, Schapera, Krige and later the Mayers, also bemoaned the desecrated state of family life and focused on the 'promiscuity' of African women in the cities filled with male migrants, with many of their black contemporaries. To understand the shift from a pre- 1900s attitude towards sexuality (emphasising sexual expression within the context of tight fertility control) to the 1930s anxiety expressed by so many people in South Africa, an anxiety still reiterated today, we need to carefully examine the evidence created by ethnographers.

Two of the most influential anthropological monographs of Southern African societies, written around this time by Hunter Wilson and Schapera, addressed the issue of premarital sexuality, pregnancy and sexual socialization head on. What makes these works distinctive is their very rich and layered testimony and contextual treatment the encroaching influences of both missionary teaching and 'town life' on African women and

[19] Cite the relevant publications: SA Journal of Medicine as a MOH for A B Xuma; Teacher journal for Maxeke; “Native Economic Commission” and Umehani Khan thesis, as well as the “Bantu Purity League” papers for Makanya.

men's ideas about legitimate adolescent sexual experimentation (especially *ukumetsha,* or non-penetrative heterosexual intercourse between the thighs). Both Hunter Wilson and Schapera went to great lengths to provide detailed definitions of the complex and highly regulated stages through which most African marriages proceeded before people were finally and totally 'married'. They wrote detailed accounts on the importance and meaning of bridewealth transactions (*lobola* in Nguni languages and *bogadi* in Tswana), and they took pains to explain the purpose behind the spacing of marriage and betrothal ceremonies - in many cases the latter taking place over years. Both authors also spent considerable time developing an analysis of human sexual expression in the societies they studied. What is most fruitful about their discussions of sexuality, is the way they rooted their analyses in material life and historical change.

Hunter Wilson was more self critical about the "culture contact" thesis in vogue in the 1930s, and about her particular emphasis on change-over-time, in the 1960 preface to her second edition of the 1936 monograph. In it she wrote:

> This book is concerned with change in society. No doubt it contains what E. M Forster calls "improper references to time", but at least time is taken into account.[20]

Her early training as an undergraduate historian might have lent her this sensitivity but my view is that her experience and childhood ken of the Eastern Cape undergirded her sense of a world under siege and the contextual leaning of her work speaks to her sense of her own life cycle and what she had witnessed before she was aware of a world outside of Lovedale or the Hogsback. While both Schapera and Hunter Wilson provided complex insights into the sexual expression of young women and men her work is richer in this regard. Like Schapera instead of generalising about the sexuality of the people they interviewed, Hunter Wilson's writing, employing as it does many telling anecdotes, vignettes and direct quotations, emphasises even more fully the great range between

[20] Monica Hunter *Reaction to Conquest*, p. xiii.

individuals and their sexual personalities.

Hunter Wilson's work on premarital sexuality and married life makes much of another theme: sexual individualism and the yearning for lovers. This is a theme in Schapera and Krige's work, but not in the same detail or to the same extent. Hunter Wilson takes care to evince why and how younger women, in particular, experienced much wider latitude and greater independence (despite the burdens of household and productive labour which fell most heavily on married women), in the expression of their sexuality and the choosing of lovers (her word) before actual marriage transactions and ceremonies took place. She also returns again and again to the theme of the older mother-woman who gains independence as well as burdens from the absence of men and the taking of lovers. Sexual relations with a present spouse as well as with lovers, is a subject given space in several chapters. Here we can see that she is laying the groundwork for an insurgent critique of the sexual double standards in her own social learning. While the particular sex-gender divisions of Cape Nguni society were decried by many church and state officials she shows her reader that Pondo women expected, and found, sexual satisfaction and relationship, both with spouses and with others, as did Pondo men, and though sexual chastity was a greater expectation for married women than men, liaisons outside of union for both sexes was provided for, and fertility contingencies were well known. Pregnancies, as a result of love outside of the marriage-bond, were encircled with a complex of fines; public obligations and known euphemism. It is clear from her writing that she wants the reader to know that in marriage, with its powerful emphasis on reproduction of the household, especially the birthing of children, 'sexuality' was not necessarily the key issue, nor was marriage necessarily the key place for sexual expression to take place. Although Hunter Wilson does devote some analysis to the function of *lobola* in stabilising sexual unions, she emphasises the wide range of permissible sexual behaviours.

The emphasis on relative sexual freedom of expression in Hunter Wilson 's section on premarital life is juxtaposed with her analysis of the transformations expected in a women's labour, conduct and sexuality after marriage. Her work suggests that before the 1930s and early 1940s, adolescent experiences of sexual experimentation, flirtation, and

youth- controlled negotiations of opposite-gender sexual satisfaction, would have been a common experience for many of the black women who came to the city at this time. This information about 'sweethearting', the entertainment and privacy allowed to young people, and the practice of sexual play, provided her readers with fresh insights into the adolescent socialisation of boys and girls before the intrusion of missionary influence and the debarring of these rites of passage by large numbers of practicing Christians.

Thus Hunter Wilson provides clear and compelling evidence that premarital sexual activity was not a new feature of urban life. Most importantly perhaps for this paper is implication of her argument about the causes of the 'sexuality crisis' of the 1930s. Rather than the rise in female pregnancies and STDs lying with the so-called 'lax morality' of urban women and the dangerous sexual appetite of black youth, Hunter Wilson provides evidence that the impact of Christian views about appropriate sexual behaviour and training stifled so much that was creative and useful and dynamic in African communities' approaches to sex. Insisting that youthful sexual flirtations and activities had to cease, missionaries replaced these long standing traditions with little more than a policy of 'complete sexual abstinence' before marriage, as well as a few modest adolescent rites of passage of their own, such as confirmation ceremonies. Hunter Wilson's text is shot through with a carefully contained critique of this position. She is careful to place these arguments in the mouths of informants and leads up to them with painstaking manoeuvre. She draws on medical and expert texts besides her own to bolster this line of implicit critique of missionary influence.[21] Here she was touching on themes very 'close to home'. Besides the influence of Christian teaching, the highly regulated sexual education and the practices of young people were difficult to reproduce in urban shanty towns, backyards, compounds and slums. In rural areas, adults and older siblings could draw on personal contacts and knowledge to punish offenders of local rules. This was not possible among strangers in the new urban areas. So the very foundations of rural life, which underlay teenage sexual socialisation, were being stripped away, and

[21] Cite the sections in Part II (Town) and Part III (Farm life) for her references to this; as well as her use of P. Laidler, MOH of East London and his official health and sanitation. See P. W. Laidler, "The Medico-Social Aspects of Population Density", *South African Medical Journal* (9 May 1936).

missionary teaching exacerbated this. Instead, a very unrealistic 'replacement' (no sexual activity before marriage) was offered as a substitute. This was a powerful and radical critique, and as compelling a challenge as the class and communist analysis of her close friend Edward Roux. In subsequent decades analyses of South African formations in the 1970s and 1980s overlooked this radical aspect of her work and cast her as a liberal and even missionary or settler apologist. Viewed from the space of the HIV/AIDs crisis of the late 20th and early 21st century pandemic, and the massive energy released around sexual agency, rights and practices generated in response to this, Hunter Wilson's contrary and sharp analysis appears in a new light.

Towards a conclusion

In post-Apartheid South Africa the links between human rights, sexuality, and sexual orientation emerged into a *de jure* protected national public space for the first time. After 1994 the production and circulation of erotic, sexual health rights; gender inequality; sexual stigma; and other less obviously sexually implicated debates, began to emerge on the "national stage". There is no possible way that Monica Hunter Wilson could have imagined all of these futures in her 1930s, let alone in her late 1970s, published work. In South Africa of the last decade all of these public utterances emerged in the midst of a new naming, counting, analysis of "violence against women and youth" and "the rising toll of HIV-related illness and death". How do all these productions, experiences, and discourses interconnect with past expertise? Has the shifting political economy been more implicated with sexual violence and sexual illness, as well as the *de facto* limits to sexual expression, than the rise of new cultures, legal frameworks and discourses of freedom?

In the decades after the 1940s work on sexuality in sociological and anthropological work became fossilised, more formulaic and dryer. Psychologists, psychiatrists, religious experts, forensic specialists, therapists, experts in the broken family, and legal theorists

stepped into the space of research and writing about sex in South Africa.[22] Historians eschewed sexuality as a major theme until the early 1980s, and even then few ventured where Van Onselen did, in his explorations of sexuality and political economy in the early history of the urban pre-1930s Witwatersrand. In the years since the publication of the rich but very problematic study by Laura Longmore, *The Dispossessed: A Study of the Sex Life of Bantu Women in and Around Johannesburg,* there has been no single full and sweeping study of the history of sex in any city or region of South Africa. In the last five years studies of sex contexts, sex partnering, sexual practices, sex education, and discourses of sex have been undertaken by many groups and individuals—especially those connected with the health sciences (though this is changing now) as part of HIV/AIDS research and planned treatment and intervention. In many monographs and edited collections, journal articles and theses on the social history, sociology and anthropology of the Southern African region; in works on health and healing; in poetry and prose; in many works of art and performance; in musical creation and in film; as well as in demographic and economic surveys and works, the themes of fertility and sexuality have played a central role. But these have not been gathered and analyzed in relation to one another. In these works pre-colonial migrations; colonial dispossession and the privatization of property in the hands of a few; waged labour; large scale migrations and rearrangements of households and family lineages and ways of life; new tensions in gender and age dynamics; new pressures on human physical capacity and the emergence of new psychological and dialogical selves, have been described and analyzed, and in these accounts a broader theory of sexuality has sometimes been alluded to, but seldom

[22] Cite here Louis Franklin Freed's 1950s studies; as well as Laura Longmore *The Dispossessed: A Study of the Sex Life of Bantu Women in and Around Johannesburg* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1959); cite C. Van Onselen's chapters oh sex work in his political and economic history of the Witwatersrand also see Mark Hunter PhD thesis University of California, 2006; and Mark Hunter "The Changing Political Economy of Sex in South Africa: the Significance of Unemployment and Inequalities to the Scale of the Aids pandemic", *Social Science and Medicine* (2007: 64).

discussed as a subject in itself.[23]

An exception to this was the bringing together of the edition, "*African sexualities*", the sub-title of the special issue of *Culture, Health & Sexuality* published in May 2005.[24] In the "Introduction" the editors, Reid and Walker, soon delimited the edition to a concern with Southern African sexualities and argued that the edition contributed a "more nuanced and holistic" understanding. In this widely read set of papers a single area of conclusion and agreement across all papers emerged: with deep textual, oral and ethnographic research all the authors demonstrated that the oft-heard popular and officially-made claim, that "tradition" is the generator of African sexualities, is unsupportable. When "tradition" is deployed as a series of unbroken, deeply held, uniform sets of practices, experiences and discourses from some distant past into the here and now, this body of collected research finds that "traditionalist" explanations disguise and obfuscate more than they clarify and explain.

Monica Hunter Wilson's study of sexuality and related social, material, moral, political, and physiological forces in her broad monograph on Pondoland made this clear more than 70 years ago.

In *African Sexualities*, as well as many of his published papers, the historical geographer Mark Hunter draws on Monica Wilson-Hunter, as well as other 20th century ethnographers of Nguni society, to show that "Zulu manliness" has had a complex and

[23] See the excellent edition of papers in *African Studies* published in July 2002, and edited by Liz Walker and Peter Delius which arose from the WITS workshop "AIDS in Social Context" in 2000. An monograph on sexually transmitted diseases in South Africa by Karen Jochelson is a useful starting point. Her book, *The Colour of Disease: Syphilis and racism in South Africa, 1880 to 1950* (London: St Anthony/ MacMillan Series, 2001), is country-wide in scope and does have many interesting things to say about sexual practices and ideas, though this is not the focus of the book.

[24] The volume grew out of a conference, "Sex and Secrecy".[24] This gathering was the 4th conference of the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS) "Sex and Secrecy",

shifting history and that the figure of the male lover, the *isoka*, has emerged over time and in the midst of innovation. Here Mark Hunter and other authors in this edition argue that the continued salience in daily discourses, of claims to authentic "traditional" gender roles and "traditional cultures of sexuality", requires effort to be sustained.

This is an example of the arguments advanced by some of the recent historical, anthropological, sociological and theological production on sexuality and gender roles. The threadbare quality of "tradition claims" becomes apparent on closer inspection. Alas this knowledge is not moving outside of the academy and into public health or more popular discourses. We do not yet however have a good enough account of the reasons for the continued salience and power of claims for "an unbroken patriarchal tradition" in gender and sexual arenas of public space in Southern Africa. What work do these claims "do"? Why does this research—and many related examples have been published in the last 5 years—fail to shake, let alone undermine the continued and perhaps power of the notion of "traditional sexuality" in the market place of ideas? Why does it appear that so few people, exercised by and working on aspects of southern Africa's crisis of sexual health, find their way to reading Monica Hunter Wilson's work today?

Christianity, and the form of Victorian and Edwardian Christian thinking about sexuality that arrived in Southern African contexts with the force of capital, carrying commercial products, and under the umbrella of colonial rule, has not yet been fully parsed. Monica Hunter Wilson's imaginative empathy and intellectual curiosity, as well as her unflinching sense of the hypocrisy of much missionary teaching about sexuality, provided a space in the 1930s for interested and emotionally rich accounts of sexualities and their place in analysis and social debate "as lived". Her writing is still fresh and radical in this light today.

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