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**Anthropology and Literature: Humanistic Themes in the Ethnographic  
Fiction of Hilda Kuper and Edith Turner**

**Supervisor:** Professor Andrew Bank

**A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts  
degree in History, University of the Western Cape, December 2020.**

## Declaration

I, Zuleika Bibi Shaik, declare that “Anthropology and Literature: Humanistic Themes in the Ethnographic Fiction of Hilda Kuper and Edith Turner” is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Zuleika Shaik

December 2020



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This thesis is dedicated to Ali and Maryam



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## Acknowledgment

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The challenges that I experienced during the period of my MA were almost insurmountable. This is why I wish to dedicate my thesis to my one and only daughter. One of the many reasons that I have completed this project despite all odds is to show you that a woman of the 21st century can overcome anything. Keep your head high and let your strength shine my little girl.



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## Abstract

This mini-thesis makes an argument for the significance of a female-dominated hidden tradition of experimental ethnographic writing in British social anthropology. It argues that the women anthropologists who experimented with creative forms of ethnography were doubly marginalised: first as women in an androcentric male canon in British social anthropology and American cultural anthropology, and second as creative writers whose work has been consistently undervalued in sombre scholarly circles. The study proposes that Hilda Beemer Kuper (1911-1995) and Edith Turner (1921-2016) should be regarded as significant in a still unexcavated literary tradition or subgenre with Anglo-American anthropology. It showcases the narrative craft of Kuper through a detailed textual analysis of her two most accomplished experimental ethnographies *A Witch in My Heart* (written in 1954, performed in 1955, and published in siSwati in 1962 and English in London in 1970) and *A Bite of Hunger* (written in 1958 and published in America in 1965). I highlight Kuper's multiple literary techniques in evoking of the fraught position of young Swazi co-wives, modern women and women accused of witchcraft in a patriarchal culture with particular attention to her gifts in creating dramatic plots, complex characters and dialogue rich in vernacular metaphor and proverbs. It then celebrates the even more experimental creative writing of Edith Turner. While Turner has sometimes been acknowledged for her hidden contributions to the co-production of her deeply loved and more famous husband Victor, she has not been given her due as an experimental ethnographer, also placing the experiences of African women centre-stage. In what she overtly advertised as "female literary style", Turner's belatedly published 1987 novel *The Spirit and the Drum. A Memoir of Africa* is analysed with meticulous attention to the literary techniques by which she seeks to explore an anthropology of experience and empathy. These accomplished but under-acknowledged women creative writers sought to explore what they both explicitly conceived of as gestures of humanist cross-cultural engagement.

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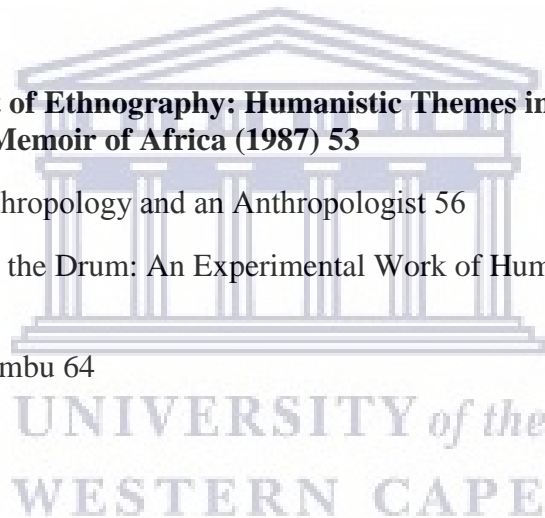
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## Introduction

### Women Anthropologists and Their Hidden Literary Tradition

Histories of American cultural anthropology and British social anthropology have been dominated by “The Founding Fathers”. The anthropological monograph in its classic style is typically traced back to the late 1890s and the works of Franz Boas in America and Edward B. Tylor at Oxford. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski are seen to have dominated the discipline in the British social anthropology tradition in the twentieth century before E.E Evans- Pritchard took over in later decades.<sup>1</sup>

Franz Boas, born in 1858 and of German origin, developed cultural anthropology from 1886 onwards after arriving in New York. He advocated empirical data collection, claiming that “nations” and “tribes” were complex collectives that needed careful study. He is widely recognised as the most important figure in American anthropology.<sup>2</sup>

Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, born in 1881, studied anthropology at Cambridge after completing his studies in the medical field. He then went on to do fieldwork in the Andaman Islands between the years 1906 and 1908. His 1922 monograph entitled *Andaman Islanders* is rightly regarded as one of the founding texts of the modern British school of social anthropology. Radcliffe-Brown was strongly influenced by Durkheim’s theory of social cohesion and subsequently influenced anthropology outside of Europe. He founded the School of African Life and Languages at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, from 1921-1925 (and spent some years as professor at Rhodes University from 1949-51). He also worked in Australia where he founded the social anthropology department at Sydney

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<sup>1</sup> Henrika Kuklick, *A New History of Anthropology* (London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008), 52.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Erikson and Finn Nielsen, *A History of Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press 2013), 49.

University, joined by Raymond Firth. Lastly, in America his structural anthropology had considerable theoretical influence during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>3</sup>

His fellow Founding Father of the functionalist school, Malinowski, was born in 1884 and grew up in Poland. He became an Anglophile from the time he studied at the London School of Economics (LSE) from 1910. Malinowski was famously stranded in the Trobriand Islands during WWI, having initially studied the kinship system of Aboriginal peoples. After his second visit to the Trobriand Islands, he published *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* in 1922, the same year that Radcliffe-Brown's *Andaman Islanders* appeared. Malinowski's first Trobriand monograph has widely been considered as the "single most revolutionary work in the history of anthropology".<sup>4</sup> He then taught a group of junior associates at LSE, sharing his fieldwork methods and functionalist theory and overseeing the development of a fieldwork-based ethnographic school funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and based at the L.S.E. This was before his departure for the United States in 1938 where he drew further adherents.<sup>5</sup>

Although these men were indeed towering figures in the formation of a new discipline, women also made considerable and much less widely acknowledged contributions to the establishment and subsequent development of American cultural anthropology and British social anthropology. Some scholars have attempted to highlight their contributions and therefore their importance in new narratives about the history of the discipline. A

*Biographical Dictionary of Women Anthropologists* was published in 1989 by New York's

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 50. On Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown as twin founding fathers and 1922 as the year of creation of the new discipline see the opening two chapters of Adam Kuper, *Anthropologists and Anthropology: The British School, 1922-1973* (London: Kegan Paul, 1973). The classic account of the history of anthropology is now in its fifth edition.

Greenwood Press and sought to highlight the role of significant women in the American and British traditions.<sup>6</sup>

Some of the most significant challenges to the androcentric canon have taken the form of regional studies which highlight the under-acknowledged role of women in particular fields. According to Nancy Parezo in her edited collection of essays entitled *Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists in the Native American Southwest*, some 1600 women worked in the American Southwest on Native American cultures. This is an impressively large number especially considering that only a few of them, including the esteemed Ruth Benedict, were given any recognition for their work. Parezo therefore poses the question: “who can work in the Southwest and not refer to at least one site report or ethnography by a woman anthropologist?”<sup>7</sup>

*Hidden Scholars* consists of sixteen essays, exploring in part the reasons why these women were constrained by obstacles including lack of access to publishing outlets and low income jobs at academic institutions. It also presents biographical essays of several women anthropologists of the Native American Southwest, including Matilda Coxe Stevenson, Elsie Clews Parsons and Gladys Reichard.<sup>8</sup>

In 2004 Louise Lamphere revisited her discussion of Reichard, who she claims to have been “largely unrecognized for her scholarly work”.<sup>9</sup> This formed part of Lamphere’s Presidential Address at the 100<sup>th</sup> meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) held in 2001, which was published as a journal article three years later. Here Lamphere broadens her case into a general argument about the re-evaluation of work “from the margins” by women

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<sup>6</sup> Ute Gacs et al, eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of Women Anthropologists* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Parezo, *Hidden Women Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest* (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 1993), xiii

<sup>8</sup> Parezo, Essays by Louis Hiebs and Louise Lamphere, *Hidden Women Scholars*, 68, 39, 43 and 177.

<sup>9</sup> Louise Lamphere, “Unofficial Histories: A Vision of Anthropology from the Margins”, *American Anthropologist*, 160, 1 (2004), 127.

and cultural minorities. Despite their obvious achievements and contributions to what Margaret Mead once called “The Welcoming Science” (1960), even the most renowned women anthropologists were not fully credited for their achievements. Lamphere includes Mead, Parsons and Benedict, for having had “the greatest impact on the anthropology of their time”. One can only imagine how undervalued women anthropologists in general are when considering that even these significantly accomplished and well-known women experienced some form of marginality.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise in the case of South African anthropology, Andrew Bank successfully attempts to rethink “the androcentric canon” that has dominated the history of social anthropology in this country and region. Across six chapters he argues that the formation of social anthropology should not be limited to British history, but that South Africa too contributed significant intellectuals in this discipline. He challenges the standard narrative that South African anthropology was founded by Radcliffe-Brown in 1921 at UCT, who was succeeded by his young student Isaac Schapera after his return from the L.S.E. in 1929, until he left for London two decades later. Schapera was in turn influenced by Max Gluckman during a semester of lectures at Wits and a student fieldtrip. Thus the Holy Trio of Radcliffe-Brown, Schapera and Gluckman are credited with having developed “the one society” model that represented South African anthropology. The latter in particular is usually credited with having laid to rest the tribal island-confined model of social anthropology advocated by Malinowski.

Instead, Bank argues that women scholars, notably Winifred Hoernle, played a crucial role in co-founding the discipline with Radcliffe-Brown. He goes on to demonstrate that ‘the Mother of South African anthropology’, as she was known to her students, was far more influential in the long term than Radcliffe-Brown. This was because she trained a new and pioneering generation of women fieldworkers and ethnographers at Wits who effectively established the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 28.

fieldwork-driven ethnographic tradition across southern Africa. “Hoernle’s daughters” played the dominant role in developing social anthropology as a university-based discipline in South Africa between 1923, when Hoernle was employed at Wits as head of anthropology, until 1973 when Monica Hunter Wilson retired as UCT professor of anthropology. While their male peers left for Europe or Australia (Radcliffe-Brown in 1925, Gluckman in 1934 and Schapera in 1949, in the latter two cases never to return), South Africa’s women anthropologists remained and developed the discipline from within, under the extremely difficult periods of segregation and apartheid.

In particular, Hunter Wilson worked as anthropologist at the University of Fort Hare in 1944-6, and then as the first woman professor in the country at Rhodes University from 1946-1951. Her most influential period, as stated by Bank, was at UCT from 1952-1973. Audrey Richards and then Hilda Beemer Kuper were Hoernle’s successors at Wits from 1938 to 1996. Beemer Kuper and Eileen Jensen Krige developed the discipline at the University of Natal from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Bank provides chapter-length intellectual biographies of these six “pioneers of the field”: Winifred Tucker Hoernle (1885-1960), Monica Hunter Wilson (1908-1982), Ellen Hellman (1908-1982), Audrey Richards (1899-1984), Hilda Kuper (1911-1995) and Eileen Jensen Krige (1904-1995). He thereby successfully rewrites the entire history of the discipline from the margins, crediting these women with founding the field of urban anthropology in Africa, the study of women in African anthropology, the study of social change along with male peers and nurturing new generations of influential African and women scholars.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Bank, *Pioneers of the Field*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). For the standard narrative that he challenges see W. David Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters: South Africa’s Anthropologists, 1920-1990* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1997; second edition 2001). Not coincidentally, Hammond-Tooke was a student of Isaac Schapera’s at UCT during the 1940s.

In an introduction which highlights the marginality of women anthropologists in standard histories, Bank reveals that only 20% of the social and cultural anthropologists deemed worthy of inclusion in the massively popular *Fifty Key Anthropologists*, published by Routledge and Kegan Paul in New York in 2011, are women. No fewer than forty of the fifty are Founding Fathers rather than Foremothers, sadly indicative of the persistence of androcentrism in even the most contemporary versions of its history.<sup>12</sup> This echoes the male dominated narrative of Sydel Silverman, in which only two of the nine founding figures in American cultural anthropology are women.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Literary Turn: Women Writing Culture**

In an effort to explore the significance of women in anthropology, one surely needs to focus on what arguably has been one of their greatest contributions to the discipline: namely their experimentation with creative writing. In general, anthropologists have widely experimented with works of fiction on a global level. An impressive total of more than sixty anthropologists had published creative texts of fiction in English by 1984, and it is fair to assume that this number has increased more rapidly in the intervening thirty-five years.<sup>14</sup> Such works are of course not limited to one specific language or location, as publications in Portuguese, German and French ethnographic literatures attest.<sup>15</sup> Just as regional traditions of women anthropologists' fieldwork and ethnography may vary from the American Southwest to South Africa, so experimental writing by women anthropologists has varied within different national traditions. In French anthropology, for example, there is a tradition of "two books", where the anthropologists tend to experiment with creative writing as their second

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Gordon, Andrew P. Lyons and Harriet D. Lyons, eds., *Fifty Key Anthropologists* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 7.

<sup>13</sup> See Sydel Silverman, *Totem and Teachers: Key Figures in the History of Anthropology* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1981, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Schmidt, "Ethnographic Fiction: Anthropology's Hidden Literary Style", *Anthropology and Humanism*, (Indiana: Indiana University, 1984), 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

publication.<sup>16</sup> My research, however, focuses on women working within the British social anthropology tradition, where no such pattern is located.

One of the first successful attempts at fictional ethnography by a female anthropologist is American- born but Oxford- trained, Laura Bohannan who published a highly accomplished novel entitled *Return to Laughter* in 1954. It runs across 255 pages and she celebrates its fictitious qualities in an introduction:

All the characters in this book, except myself, are fictitious in the fullest meaning of the word. I knew people of the type I have described here; the incidents of the book are of the genre I myself experienced in Africa. Nevertheless, so much is fiction. I am an anthropologist. The tribe I have described here does exist. Here I have written simply as a human being.<sup>17</sup>

From reading the note, one gets the sense that Elenore Smith Bowen, her pseudonym for this text, anticipated criticism regarding the identification of the novel as a work of anthropology, given its element of fiction. She therefore attests that it does fit within the discipline of anthropology despite being a subjective account of West African life. One might also note the “humanist” gesture in her final sentence: “Here I have written simply as a human being”. The chapters in this thesis seek to explore what two women peers, also writing in the mid-1950s for the first time, understood by this impulse to write “as a human being” rather than as a social scientist informed by structural theory.

Bohannan’s work of ethnographic fiction has elicited more scholarly interest than any other experimental writings by women and remains in a sense the landmark text in this field.

Amanda Coffey, for example, highlights the qualitative and emotive ethnographic research method described in *Return to Laughter*. In the second chapter of her reflections on *The Ethnographic Self*, published in 1999, Coffey uses Bowen’s novel to assert that one cannot divorce the self from the ethnographic text, and therefore an autobiographical element is

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<sup>16</sup> Vincent Debaene translated by Justin Izzo, *Far Afield: French Anthropology Between Science and Literature* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>17</sup> Elenore Smith Bowen, *Return to Laughter* (London: Readers Union Ltd, 1956 edition), 5.



always present in ethnographic writing, whether avowedly fictive or otherwise. “[T]here is no escaping the mental and physical presence of the researcher”. She uses Bowen’s ethnographic novel to highlight the intimacy of the relationship between the ethnographer and the field. She claims that little research has been conducted to explore the ways that fieldwork affects the anthropologist, despite the many attempts by ethnographers to “personalise their accounts” and write their human experiences into their novels or monographs.<sup>18</sup>

A later and more popular example of ethnographic fiction by women writers is the science fiction work of novelist, Ursula Le Guin. Although she was not formally trained as an anthropologist, her work was immensely popular for its anthropological themes. Her parents Theodora and Alfred Kroeber were instrumental in shaping her preoccupation with ethnographic fiction novels from the 1960s. The novels typically feature anthropologists as central protagonists “immersed in an unfamiliar society learning its history, social and political organisation, expression and beliefs”.<sup>19</sup> This is certainly true of her most widely read novels including *The Dispossessed* (1974) and *The Word for the World is Forest* (1976).<sup>20</sup>

The body of ethnographic fiction was well enough established by the 1980s for scholarly works to emerge, critically reflecting on this tradition in which women authors had played a dominant role. Whether they were anthropologists’ wives, like Laura Bohannan and Edith Turner, or anthropologists’ daughters, like Ursula Le Guin, or women anthropologists independent of such ties as in the case Hilda Kuper, they are all important figures within the genre of creative writing in anthropology. Scholars of the 1980s attempted to reflect on this subgenre within anthropology. Lewis Langness, Gregory Reck, Stephen Webster, Clifford

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<sup>18</sup> Amanda Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Beth Baker-Cristales, “Poiesis of Possibility: The Ethnographic Sensibilities of Ursula K. Le Guin”, *Anthropology and Humanism*, 37, 1 (Los Angeles: California State University, 2012), 15.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 17 and 18. See also *Rocannon’s World* (1996).



Geertz and Nancy Schmidt were among those who analysed the relationship between fiction and ethnography.<sup>21</sup>

In his famous study *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), Clifford Geertz made the claim that ethnographic works can essentially be described as fiction, as the ethnographer cannot fully capture all the details and of experiences in the field in authentic form.<sup>22</sup> This is a point echoed by James Clifford in 1986 when he states that “[e]thnographic writings can properly be called fictions, in the sense of ‘something made or fashioned’.<sup>23</sup> Therefore during this time in the 1980s American cultural anthropologists, Clifford and George Marcus, saw it necessary to explore the centrality of narrative construction in the production of ethnographic knowledge both in the field and beyond. Their 1986 work titled *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* has remained popular in conceptualising the place of narrative in ethnography. They highlight the complexities of objectivity and reflexivity within fieldwork, open up questions about authorship and authority, marking a pivotal moment for ethnographers to understand the “messiness” of the micro-politics in the field and the authorial tendency to suppress this subjective human world.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the success of conceptualising the complexities of the politics and poetics of anthropological writing, *Writing Culture* also generated intense debates over the gender of the genre. Clifford was rightly and fiercely criticised for his outrageous claim that women writers have “not produced either unconventional forms of writing, or a developed reflection on ethnographic textuality as such”.<sup>25</sup> This claim was emphatically debunked in Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon’s book of collected works titled *Women Writing Culture*, published in

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<sup>21</sup> Schmidt, “Ethnography and Fiction”, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973).

<sup>23</sup> James Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths”, in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* edited by James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 6.

<sup>24</sup> James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

1995.<sup>26</sup> From the onset of the book, one gets the sense of annoyance felt by the female editors towards the male-dominated canon proposed by Clifford and Marcus. In the introduction Behar questions “why the culture concept in anthropology [is] only found through Sir Edward Tylor, Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Clifford Geertz”. She asks whether the writing of culture in anthropology could not be tracked instead through influential women from “Elsie Clews Parsons, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Ella Doloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Ruth Landes and Barbara Meyerhoff to Alice Walker”.<sup>27</sup>

In chapter thirteen of *Women Writing Culture*, Barbara Tedlock states that “it has been mainly women who have published experimental fieldwork materials. Where husband and wife worked in the same region, it was usually the woman who adopted the narrative mode and the man the expository one”.<sup>28</sup> She explores wife anthropologists and their efforts in assisting their husbands in the field and subsequently producing experimental works. These include women ethnographers such as Dorothy Amaury, Mary Smith, Margery Wolf, Elizabeth Fern and Edith Turner.<sup>29</sup>

Behar and Gordon did not recognise these writers merely as wives to anthropologists, but as mothers and ethnographers in their own right. They highlight the complex roles of these women in the field and beyond by exploring their relationships as ethnographer’s assistant to their husbands, and then as ethnographer and novelist.<sup>30</sup> What becomes increasingly evident is the fact that not only is there a hidden tradition in women’s ability to convey fieldwork in a novel and creative way, but also a hidden story about the extent to which husbands in social and cultural anthropology relied on the usually unacknowledged or under-acknowledged labours of their wives to achieve their own success. Rosemary Firth accompanied her

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<sup>26</sup> Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley, University of California Press: 1995).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Tedlock, “Works and Wives: On the Sexual Division of Textual Labour” in *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley, University of California Press: 1995), 267.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 268.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

husband to Southeast Asia in the role of general assistant. This was also the case of multiple other wife anthropologists, including Fernea and Turner.<sup>31</sup> Matthew Engelke, a devoted student of Edith Turner from her years as a lecturer at The University of Virginia in the 1990s, reveals the engaged and essential collaborative role she played in the writing of her more famous husband Victor Turner's doctoral thesis in particular.<sup>32</sup>

Nancy Schmidt, in her 1984 overview article, argues that "a hidden literary style" exists within anthropology. While she too identifies various anthropologists' literary experiments, she provides reasons as to why their works of fiction remain hidden. One reason for this is that, as in the case of Laura Bohannan, some anthropologists wrote under pseudonyms. They include Margaret Field, but also male anthropologists writing as Mark Freshfield and Philip Ducker. This kept their works hidden.<sup>33</sup> In other cases women anthropologists' fictional works were "swept under the rug" for not fitting within the rigid framework of the ethnographic monographs. This is seen to have been true for Zora Neal Hurston, who published collections on Afro-American folklore.<sup>34</sup> After Hurston graduated from Barnard College in 1927, she proceeded to conduct field research in Eatonville, gathering folklore songs, jokes, and stories. She published *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1938), two books which amalgamated ethnography and novelistic qualities. In the view of Lamphere, "her [Hurston's] novelist attention to detail and character, and her belief in the richness of black culture allowed her to create ethnographic descriptions that were unequalled by most anthropologists".<sup>35</sup> Despite Hurston's impressive skills in combining ethnography and creative writing, her ethnographic fiction has not been granted sufficient recognition

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 268- 271.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew Engelke, "The Endless Conversation: Fieldwork, Writing and the Marriage of Victor and Edith Turner". In *Significant Others: Interpersonal and Professional Commitments in Anthropology*, ed. Richard Handler (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Schmidt, "Ethnographic Fiction", 11.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Lamphere, "Unofficial Histories", 133.

because it has been regarded as being “too eclectic for anthropologists to consider within a narrowly defined genre of ethnography”.<sup>36</sup>

Schmidt claims that another reason for ethnographic fiction being side lined is because of editors of journals rejecting fictional works for review. Creative writing on important ethnographic themes has seldom featured in the review pages of prestigious anthropological journals,<sup>37</sup> and this is certainly true of the significant works of experimental fiction analysed in detail in this thesis. In this sense women have been doubly marginalised, first as women anthropologists, and then as women experimental writers.

### **Scholarly Work on the Experimental Writing of Hilda Kuper and Edith Turner**

In an attempt to respond to both factors of marginality, I have selected the works of two prominent women ethnographers writing and publishing in the mid- to late twentieth century, Hilda Beemer Kuper (born in Bulawayo in 1911) and Edith Turner (born in Ely in 1921).

Nancy Schmidt is one of the scholars who recognised that the work of Hilda Kuper as ethnographer provided insight into her experimental fiction.<sup>38</sup> According to Kuper, as cited by Schmidt, she experimented with ethnographic fiction to provide a “humanly realistic” element that is absent in “standard” ethnography. Although the characters in her creative writing were invented, the incidents and experiences of the characters were not, and were based on extended fieldwork in Swaziland. Kuper thus acknowledges that a relationship between fact and fiction exists, and makes use of it in her ethnographic works.<sup>39</sup>

Schmidt claims that Kuper’s most evident reason for experimenting with ethnographic fiction is her preoccupation with creating a “humanistic” understanding of Swazi culture. So, for

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<sup>36</sup> Schmidt, “Ethnographic Fiction”, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 13.

example, Kuper claims that her play, *A Witch in My Heart: A Play Set in Swaziland*<sup>40</sup> (performed in 1956 but first published in English in 1970) is not primarily focused on the element of witchcraft in Swaziland, but has more to do with “human emotions - love, hate, jealousy, and despair”. Schmidt accurately states that it is through literary techniques that Kuper is able to provide insight into human experiences and emotions, which would be difficult to achieve through ethnography alone.<sup>41</sup> Although Schmidt explores the central reasons for Kuper’s experimentation with literature, she does not provide a close analysis of her works.

Kuper’s play and creative writing have also drawn stern critique. Kerry Vincent claims that the focus on the role of women in Swazi society and “the feministic approach” he sees it as taking is flawed. His sentiments are that Kuper attempts to universalise the experience of Swazi women using a Western lens and subsequently “others” them.<sup>42</sup> He even considers this this as having had a negative social impact, given that the play has been validated by being incorporated into Swazi education and was read by learners as part of the siSwati school curriculum. According to Vincent the play justifies the presence of colonialism, by depicting women in the struggle against traditional Swazi society and its destructive concepts of witches and witchcraft.<sup>43</sup>

Andrew Bank challenges this post-colonial reading in his analysis of Kuper’s ethnographic fiction in his chapter-length analysis of her life and work in *Pioneers of the Field* (2016). He begins the chapter by citing Hilda Kuper’s UCLA student, Sondra Hale’s reflection that the reason no festschrift was published for Kuper upon her retirement from UCLA in 1977 was because her experimental writing “was ahead of its time”. Hale and her prospective co-editors

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<sup>40</sup> Hilda Kuper, *A Witch In My Heart: A Play Set in Swaziland*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Kerry Vincent, “Translating Culture: Literature, Anthropology, and Hilda Kuper’s A Witch in My Heart”, *Current Writing*, (2002), 114, 116.

<sup>43</sup> Vincent, “Translating Culture”, 114, 116 and 117.

realised that in 1977 that there were not yet enough anthropologists conversant with ethnographic fiction to be able to provide an adequate analysis of the writings of an anthropologist who worked so extensively in creative forms outside the mainstream.<sup>44</sup>

Bank's concern is to highlight the importance of her works of ethnographic fiction by discussing the connection between her scholarly writing and fictional work. He describes two phases of which the early phase refers to the 1940s where her short stories had a female researcher as the main character, with a Swaziland plot. During this phase, Bank argues that her writing technique was "under developed" in her use of character and plot. However, the "second phase" of her creative writing from the 1950s proved to be far more successful.<sup>45</sup> He also provides analysis of her play and novel, *A Bite of Hunger*,<sup>46</sup> by highlighting her use of creative techniques to convey Swazi traditions. In relation to the play he discusses the main themes, of love, between the protagonist, Bigwapi and her husband, and jealousy amongst her and the co-wives. Bank further mentions that Kuper makes use of "dramatic irony, soliloquys and foreshadowing", but does not explore the scenes that portray this.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, when discussing the novel, Bank summarises the plot, setting and main themes but does not provide a close analysis of the complexities conveyed by Kuper of the main character Lamtana and her struggle to fit into the rigid Swazi traditions. He does, however, draw a connection between the two pieces for the common theme of witchcraft,<sup>48</sup> which will be fully explored in the next chapter.

Edith Turner's motives for experimenting with ethnographic fiction are made explicit in her published late-life interviews with Matthew Engelke.<sup>49</sup> The initial part of his 1997 interview

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<sup>44</sup> Sondra Hale, cited in Bank, *Pioneers of the Field*", 189 note 2.

<sup>45</sup> Bank, *Pioneers of the Field*, 191.

<sup>46</sup> Hilda Kuper, *A Bite of Hunger*, (New York: Harcourt: Brace & World, 1965).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 223.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

<sup>49</sup> Engelke, Matthew, "An Interview with Edith Turner", *Current Anthropology*, 41(5), (2000), 843.

covered the details of her very first encounter with her husband, Victor Turner,<sup>50</sup> the literature that they read, their subsequent involvement in anthropology and their collaborative fieldwork.<sup>51</sup>

In Engelke's interview with Turner, she expresses her intensely critical view of what she regards as the rigid, dry and "academically cold" structure of anthropology. During the interview she reveals her motives for experimenting with creative writing, claiming that she was more interested in "feelings". This echoes Kuper's reflections on her distaste for structural anthropology of the 1950s and her turn to fiction in reaction to this abstract form of cultural analysis.

Matthew Engelke provides a detailed interview with Edith Turner and her collaborative work with her husband. But he is also interested in the subjectivity that being a woman and mother to her children in the field brought to her research. Turner confesses that having the children with them made them seem "more human" to the Ndembu people.<sup>52</sup> This was certainly significant for Turner, as her methodology in the field, as will be discussed later, was to develop close ties to understand the humanistic qualities of what it means to be a Ndembu woman.

Furthermore, in the interview Engelke does well in trying to draw out the spirit that prompted Turner to sit down and write "Kajima". She opens up to him regarding her initial idea of the novel as a piece of work that was meant to remain "private writing", as she did not regard it as an academic piece. Even in her late life interview, Turner still maintains that Victor's career came first and her creative writing was more of a private experiment by an untrained wife than an academic contribution to anthropology.<sup>53</sup> Despite Turner's experimental

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 844.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 845.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 847.



contribution to understanding Kajima village life through *The Spirit and the Drum*<sup>54</sup> (1987), it remains a text that has not been explored at all, let alone for the “humanistic themes” it brings to the study of anthropology.

In “Books Can Be Deceiving”, Engelke provides a rich overview of Turner’s life and subsequent involvement in anthropology with her husband. He goes on to chronologically provide the titles given to Turner over the years, as time progressed and she entered different phases of her writing. These include “just a faculty wife”, “Vic’s wife”, “Vic’s partner in the field”, “co-author with Vic”, “widow of Victor Turner”, “an anthropologist in her own right”, and lastly, “an anthropologist in the newly emergent experimental tradition of the 1980s”.<sup>55</sup>

Here it is once again evident that Turner’s identity was overshadowed by her husband for much of her life.

As times progressed the need to locate women’s experimental ethnography emerged, and reviewers attempted to fit *The Spirit and the Drum* into conceptual frameworks. Engelke problematizes the rigid use of categories such as postmodernism, feminism and masculinity, as he argues that Turner’s work cannot be placed neatly into either of these boxes, due to its “richness and depth”.<sup>56</sup> Although he presents no argument about the novel’s depth, it is clear that it does bear characteristics to a feminist paradigm fiction.

The two chapters that make up this research paper will explore the literature of these two women anthropologists, Hilda Kuper and Edith Turner, to respond to the double marginality of women in anthropology. The first chapter is titled, “Casting a Spell on Ethnography: Love, Witchcraft and Modernity in Hilda Kuper’s *A Witch in My Heart* (c. 1954) and *A Bite of Hunger* (1965). It provides a detailed biographical overview of her life starting with her

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<sup>54</sup> Edith Turner, *The Spirit and the Drum: A Memoir of Africa*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>56</sup> Matthew Engelke, “Books Can Be Deceiving: Edith Turner and the Problem of Categories within Anthropology”, *Anthropology and Humanism*, 2002, 124.



formal training at Wits University in the late 1920s under Winifred Hoernle', to her subsequent postgraduate fieldwork trip with Malinowski to Swaziland in 1934. It outlines the likely reason for Kuper's turn to a literary genre, particularly her need to convey human emotions in a creative way. It then delves into a close analysis of what I regard as her two most successful pieces of experimental fiction which will be separated into themes. "Witches and Women", explores the two women protagonists, Bigwapi in *A Witch in My Heart* and Lamtana in *A Bite of Hunger* and how they struggle with the accusations of witchcraft in a society where it is the norm. The second theme "Love and Jealousy" provides a close analysis of Kuper's representation of the strong romantic love between Bigwapi and her husband, Sikova in *A Witch In My Heart*, and how it inevitably leads to a tragic separation. In *A Bite of Hunger* Kuper depicts the inner conflict that Lamtana experiences choosing between her love for her boyfriend, Feka and her passion for learning. The last theme in Chapter One, "Colonial Modernity" explores the presence of colonial administration, modern medicine and city life in a society struggling to maintain its Swazi traditions.

Chapter Two is titled, "The Heart of Ethnography: A Study of Edith Turner's Humanistic Themes in Her Novel, *The Spirit and the Drum: A Memoir of Africa*". As in Chapter one, it provides a biographical account of Edith Turner's early life and her youthful involvement in anthropology. It outlines her early education, meeting with her husband, Victor Turner and her experience as an "untrained wife" in the field in Kajima village in the far Southwest of Northern Rhodesia.

The discussion then turns to an analysis of the chapters of the novel in the order that they appear in the book. I have selected seven of the nine chapters that make up the novel for close analysis given their creative portrayal of humanistic themes of love and friendship between Turner and the women of Kajima.

The Thesis then concludes by reflecting comparatively on the creative writings of these two highly talented but under acknowledged women anthropologists. Is there not a case to be made for a fuller examination of ethnographic fiction as more than a “hidden literary style”, as Schmidt proposed in 1984, but as a female- dominated literary tradition or subgenre within the fields of British social anthropology and American cultural anthropology? Can this ethnographic literary tradition not be traced from Zora Neale Hurston through Laura Bohannan, Hilda Kuper, Ursula Le Guin to Edith Turner and Alma Gottlieb?<sup>57</sup>



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<sup>57</sup> See Alma Gottlieb and Philip Graham, *Parallel Worlds: An Anthropologist and a Writer Encounter Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

## Chapter One

### Casting a Spell on Ethnography: Love, Witchcraft and Modernity in Hilda Kuper's *A Witch in My Heart* (c. 1954) and *A Bite of Hunger* (1965)



Figure 1: The Kuper family at Chatsworth house in Derbyshire in the year 1958, possibly the time she wrote the novel, *A Bite of Hunger*. Jenny is on the left alongside Leo with Mary and Hilda on the right and cousin John Beemer in the middle.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Photograph Albums, Private Kuper Collection, Jenny Kuper, London. Thanks to Jenny Kuper for permission to use this image.

This chapter provides a close textual analysis of Hilda Kuper's two works of ethnographic fiction: the play that she wrote in the early 1950s entitled *A Witch in My Heart* and a novel that she had published in 1965 called *A Bite of Hunger*.<sup>59</sup> As noted in the introduction, there have been a few scholarly essays or sections of book chapters dealing with Kuper's experiments with ethnographic fiction. Her experimental writing also includes some twenty short stories, an outline of a second play, and a set of poetry.<sup>60</sup> Despite her significant contribution to ethnographic fiction, no scholarly work exists that adequately examines it as a work of literature. Thus these two texts have been selected for analysis with close attention to literary techniques for the following reasons. Firstly, the play is considered to have been Kuper's favourite piece of writing across her career. Secondly, her texts represent her two most extended experiments in the "hidden subgenre" of ethnographic fiction. Lastly and most significantly, they explore ethnographic and humanist themes within Swazi culture that were central to her anthropological work. These themes, namely witchcraft, love and modernity, will thus be analysed later in this chapter.

### **Hilda Kuper's Journey to Ethnographic Fiction**

In order to analyse these texts adequately, it is essential to set them within their contexts. These include formative literary influences in Kuper's education and anthropological training in the 1930s. Of consequence are also her preceding experiments with creative writing in the form of short stories in the 1940s. Her intellectual dissatisfaction with "the structuralist turn"

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<sup>59</sup> I am extremely grateful to Hilda Kuper's younger daughter Jenny Kuper for editorial suggestions and critical comments which are in her personal capacity.

<sup>60</sup> See Nancy Schmidt, "Ethnographic Fiction: Anthropology's Hidden Literary Style", *Anthropology and Humanism*, 9 (4), 1984, 11-14; Kerry Vincent, 'Translating Culture: Literature, Anthropology, and Hilda Kuper's *A Witch in My Heart*', *Current Writing*, 12(2), 2000, 113-30; Kerry Vincent, 'Literature as Laboratory: Hilda Kuper's Factional Representations of Swaziland', *African Studies*, 70(1), 2011, 89-102; Andrew Bank, 'Chapter 5 Historical ethnography and ethnographic fiction: the South African writings of Hilda Beemer Kuper (1911-1992)' in *Pioneers of the Field*, 189-238.

in British anthropology in the 1940s and 1950s,<sup>61</sup> as well as some biographical information of a personal kind help explain why Kuper chose to communicate in fictional forms.

To begin with her training, Hilda Beemer Kuper (1911-1995) studied social anthropology as an elective as an undergraduate student at Wits University. Agnes Winifred Hoernle, her lecturer from 1929 to 1931, was considered “the mother of South African anthropology”.<sup>62</sup>

Kuper was in the same undergraduate class as Ellen Hellmann and her childhood friend Max Gluckman who would later write the foreword to the International African Institute edition of *A Witch in My Heart*.<sup>63</sup> In a late life memoir Kuper recalled how Hoernle made their star class work with texts in other European languages. Gifted in French, at the age of 19 she translated the entire text of Durkheim’s *The Rules of Sociological Method* from French into English. Kuper’s interest in literature was also nurtured by her study of literary texts during her English undergraduate courses.

Kuper recalls that Hoernle taught her anthropology as a “factual discipline”,<sup>64</sup> introducing her to classic anthropological texts, such as *Life of a South African Tribe* by Junod. In her undergraduate years she had already developed an interest in working in Swaziland. This was noted in a letter of introduction by Winifred Hoernle to Bronislaw Malinowski, her soon to be lecturer in London and the supervisor for her doctoral dissertation. Hoernle stated that Kuper wished to conduct research on the effects of magic on the inhabitants of Swaziland.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See Adam Kuper, ‘Chapter 3 The Structuralist Turn’ in *Anthropologists and Anthropology: The British School, 1922-1972* (London: Kegan Paul, 1973).

<sup>62</sup> Bank, *Pioneers of the Field: South Africa’s Women Anthropologists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). The term was first publicly used by Eileen Jansen Krige and her husband Jack Krige in their dedication to Hoernle in *The Realm of A Rain- Queen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943).

<sup>63</sup> On Gluckman’s Wits years with a strong case for the influence of Hoernle in the making of ‘a modern liberal’ see Robert J. Gordon, *The Enigma of Max Gluckman: The Ethnographic Life of a ‘Luckyman’ in Africa* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 23-56.

<sup>64</sup> Hilda Kuper, “Function, History, Biography: Reflections on Fifty Years in the British Anthropological Tradition”, *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984) 196.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

Kuper credited Malinowski's "richly descriptive narrative style" as a key influence behind her late life turn to ethnographic literature.<sup>66</sup> Kuper worked as Malinowski's research assistant in 1933-4 and their seminar classes were taken up with a detailed textual analysis of the third work in Malinowski's classic series of monographs on the Trobriand Islands, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1935). He taught her the fieldwork skills that she would utilise throughout her research years and encouraged her to document her experiences and observations, scientifically using on-site field notes and a diary. He insisted that she write quarterly field reports detailing her work intricately, which he later found useful enough to discuss in his famous London School of Economics seminars.<sup>67</sup> In a rather taxonomical way, Kuper was expected to "chart" her findings using categories such as "law, kinship, economics, land tenure and religion".<sup>68</sup>

Kuper's fieldwork started in Swaziland in July 1934, when she conducted anthropological work under the support of the chief, King Sobhuza II. She was fortuitously accompanied into the field by Malinowski who was on 'An African Safari'. It included visits to his students at their southern African fieldsites, Audrey Richards in Bembaland and accompanying Kuper to Swaziland. They had recently met Sobhuza II at a conference in Johannesburg in which Malinowski, hosted by the Hoernles, was the star turn. Kuper proved to be a gifted fieldworker, describing her years in Swaziland as a "humanizing experience". This was doubtless partly a function of her linguistic gifts and she fondly recalled in her later life the first night that she dreamt in siSwati. Of significance for her later choice of Swazi women protagonists in her ethnographic fiction, she stayed in the women's royal enclosure occupied by Sobhuza's mother, wives (of whom at one point there were 39) and daughters. If her fieldwork was a humanizing revelation, the writing up of her ethnography was a painful and

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>67</sup> For a vivid and extended account of these seminars see Gordon, *The Enigma of Max Gluckman*, 65-77.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 198. These categories would later resemble sub-headings of themes explored in her monographs, such as "Blood and Kinship" and "Rights to Land".



protracted experience. She spent an enormously long period writing her L.S.E. thesis, finally submitted in August 1942. The setbacks included malaria, and the large scale ambitious nature of a project which sought to document social change and tradition. The most important reason however, was the monograph publication of another anthropologist, Brian Marwick. His work in Swaziland forced Kuper to recast her study of tradition in relation to a single theme, that of Rank in Swazi society.<sup>69</sup>

The war delayed the publication of her thesis for a further five years. To her lifelong regret, she agreed to the demands of publishers that her thesis be broken up into two ethnographic monographs. One titled *An African Aristocracy: Rank among the Swazi*, dealt with tradition and was published in London by the International African Institute.<sup>70</sup> The other titled, *A Uniform of Colour: A Study of Black-White Relationships in Swaziland*, analysed social change and was published by Wits University Press in Johannesburg.<sup>71</sup> Kuper's monographs were still deemed highly successful, particularly the concluding descriptive narrative of the "Incwala" ritual of kingship in *An African Aristocracy*.<sup>72</sup> It is fair to assume that the painful and partial process of publication, with 13 years separating her entry into the field and the publication of both monographs in 1947, might have encouraged Kuper to be open to different genres for exploring her "humanist" experience of working with women in Swaziland in the 1930s.

Following the publication of her thesis, Kuper immediately began engaging with creative writing. In the 1940s this took the form of short stories published in magazines and poetry for the expression of private emotions. For example, in 1935 Kuper got married to the lawyer turned sociologist Leo Kuper, to whom she was deeply devoted. When Leo left to fight in the

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<sup>69</sup> Bank, *Pioneers of the Field*, 199-202.

<sup>70</sup> Hilda Kuper, *An African Aristocracy: Rank Among the Swazi* (London, New York and Toronto, Oxford University Press: 1947).

<sup>71</sup> Hilda Kuper, *A Uniform of Colour: A Study of Black- White Relationships in Swaziland* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 1947).

<sup>72</sup> Kuper, *An African Aristocracy*, Chapter 8.

South African Defence Force in the Second World War, Kuper used poetry as a medium of writing love letters and consoling herself. Below is her poem titled:

“To Leo: Letter from Italy, June 1944.”

He wrote of poppies, yellow daisies, and an almond tree.  
He wrote a lovely song to me, the lover’s song of Italy.  
He wandered through the villages defeated by despair.  
He wept beside the weeping child whose parents were not there.  
He heard the guns come near, and watched the bombers soar,  
And with his friends went marching through the wheat to war.  
He spoke to lonely peasant lads who did not know to fight.  
I felt the anguish that he felt from what he did not write.<sup>73</sup>

Kuper’s daughter Jenny, born in 1949, recalled that her mother used to read poetry to her as a child, including the war poems of Rupert Brooke which evoked intense emotion. In her later reflections on her literary turn, Kuper felt that it is only literature that allows one the possibility to go beyond mainstream anthropological themes and open up about matters concerning “deep human emotions”.<sup>74</sup> In this sense it is significant that her experiments with creative writing came after her publication of conventional ethnographic monographs.

Her explicitly stated reason for experimenting with ethnographic fiction is her preoccupation with creating a “humanistic” understanding of Swazi culture. As noted in the introduction, Kuper claims that her play, *A Witch in My Heart* is not primarily focused on the element of witchcraft in Swaziland, but has also to do with “human emotions - love, hate, jealousy, and

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<sup>73</sup> Cited in Andrew Bank, *Pioneers of the Field*, 211.

<sup>74</sup> Kuper, *A Witch in My Heart*, ix.



despair". It is through literary techniques that Kuper is able to provide insight into human experiences and emotions, which would be difficult to achieve through ethnography alone.<sup>75</sup>

Very little is known about the circumstances under which Kuper wrote *A Witch in My Heart*, in the early 1950s. The play might be read in part as an expression of her celebration at her family's return to South Africa in 1952 following three miserable years in Coventry where Leo launched his academic career in Sociology. What is clear is that Kuper experimented with reconnected with what was closest to her heart in southern Africa: women in Swaziland in the 1930s. Kuper had been employed as a lecturer in the anthropology department which her mentor Hoernle had founded at Wits, succeeding Audrey Richards in 1942. She had been reluctant to leave South Africa and recalls feeling miserable and isolated in this "parochial" part of England in her essay-length late life memoir.<sup>76</sup> When Richards visited the Kupers in Durban in September 1954 towards the end of her period of directorship of the East African Institute of Social Research, she reported that 'Hilda [is] all aglow with maternity and her play and her Indian survey', suggesting that *A Witch in My Heart* had been completed by 1954. It was performed at least once in Durban in 1955, but had an extended educational afterlife as a text taught in schools, both in siSwati and English versions, and later at universities in England.<sup>77</sup>

Likewise, the circumstances associated with her writing of *A Bite of Hunger* are hazy. It is certain that it has been written in manuscript draft form before 1961<sup>78</sup> when the Kupers left apartheid South Africa for Los Angeles, even though it was only published in the United States in 1965.

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<sup>75</sup> Nancy Schmidt, "Ethnographic Fiction: Anthropology's Hidden Literary Style", *Anthropology and Humanism*, 9 (4), 1984), 11.

<sup>76</sup> Hilda Kuper, "Function, History, Biography, Reflections on Fifty Years in the British Anthropological Tradition", *Functionalism Historicized* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

<sup>77</sup> See Bank, *Pioneers of the Field*, 217.

<sup>78</sup> When Kuper was under a Simons Fellowship at Manchester University in 1958.

This was probably due to the fact that the novel was turned down by publishers, Faber and Faber. Kuper mentioned to Richards in a letter that, “[they] turned down the novel [*A Bite of Hunger*] ... If it finds no home, I’ll leave it alone, but if anyone makes an offer I’d rewrite parts, reduce the anthropology, polish the style and develop Lamtana, the main character more skilfully.”<sup>79</sup> Kuper would have polished the character for the US version, owing to the publication only later in 1965.

Kuper’s early years in America were almost as painful as those in Coventry had been. It is unlikely that she would have felt the creative surge or sense of cultural connection needed for such an extended creative work. In short, one can deduce that the play and novel were both written within a few years of one another: that is in Durban of the mid- 1950s and in Manchester in 1958. This was Kuper’s most productive, happy and highly creative period in her life as an author.<sup>80</sup>



### Witches and Women

Witchcraft was an accepted norm in Swazi culture of the 1930s, a part of what Hilda Kuper referred to as the “order and disorder” of Swazi life.<sup>81</sup> The theme of witchcraft is extensively analysed in ethnographic texts published by social anthropologists in the British tradition in the 1930s by authors like E.E. Evans-Pritchard. However, Kuper felt that the relationship between witchcraft and the individuals that it affects could not be explored in sufficient depth using the standard ethnographic format.<sup>82</sup> Although the theme of witchcraft was a social theme in anthropological monographs, the humanistic implications had been ignored. It is through creative writing that Kuper seeks to explore the complex emotional effects caused by the accusation of witchcraft within Swazi society.

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<sup>79</sup> Hilda Kuper to Audrey Richards, 27 August. 1960, Audrey Richards LSE Papers, General Correspondence. Thanks to Andrew Bank for this reference.

<sup>80</sup> Bank, *Pioneers of the Field*, 229-232.

<sup>81</sup> Schmidt, “Ethnographic Fiction”, 11.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

The central theme in Kuper's play and her later novel, as the title of the former suggests, is this theme of witchcraft. In the play the characters, mainly the central protagonist Bigwapi, endures immense suffering as a result of accusations of witchcraft against her. The barren wife of Sikova and the main character, Bigwapi is denounced and ostracised by her co-wives and in-laws for her inability to bear children. This is especially unfortunate in Swaziland, where the role of the woman is to provide offspring to carry forth the lineage.<sup>83</sup> Bigwapi is also the favourite wife in the eyes of her husband, making those in her homestead even more suspicious of her and encouraging them to charge her with bewitching Sikova. The suffering that Bigwapi undergoes comes to a head in the final Act when Sikova returns to the rural homestead after a deeply traumatic period as a migrant labourer in Johannesburg (in which he is arrested and imprisoned). He now finds that his wife has given birth to a still-born baby, and Bigwapi is accused by her co-wives of its murder through dark magic. Bigwapi looks to her husband for help, but he had already tried to do all he could for her.

Sikova tried to find traditional forms of healing that might cure Bigwapi from what Swazi society viewed as a curse and an illness. Ultimately, there is no reprieve or solace, only the lasting stigma of witchcraft. The causes of her affliction result from her inner nature, her barren womb, which serves as a metaphor for the barren land. But her affliction is also due to the fact that she is most favoured by her husband, a socially dangerous bond in a polygamous homestead. Her status as a witch is confirmed by a medicine man. The tragedy is complete when she herself internalised the social stigma, desperately declaring that "I have a witch in my heart", the line that Kuper chooses as the title of her play.

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<sup>83</sup> Kuper provides an extended analysis of the social stigma of barrenness in Swazi society in her introduction to the 1970 International African Institute publication of the book. See Kuper, *A Witch in My Heart*, xvi-xxvi.

The “heart” is a central symbol in the play’s title. Bigwapi’s mother in-law mentions that Bigwapi’s “power is in her heart”.<sup>84</sup> The word “power” already hints to the reader that Bigwapi might possess the kind of malevolent qualities associated with witchcraft. Bigwapi comes to be seen as a sinister character with abilities to manipulate her husband and those around her, through magic. The tragic implications and allegations of witchcraft come across most powerfully in the final scene. The family becomes fragmented when Bigwapi is banished from the homestead and when Sikova exiles himself as a result of his inability to save his best beloved wife from the social death of banishment. Being the only son of his parents in a patrilineal culture, Sikova should have continued the lineage into the next generation. The fact that he is leaving to return to the mines, even after his bewildering and disillusioning first encounter with the City of Gold and with no intention of coming back to the country, means that the lineage will meet its final doom.

Similarly, in Kuper’s 1965 novel *A Bite of Hunger*, witchcraft is the central theme. This is evident in the fact that the final chapter is entitled “The Witch”<sup>85</sup>. Here, too, the central protagonist is a young Swazi woman, though in this case no more than a teenager at the beginning of the story. Lamtana, the daughter of a chieftain, has an insatiable appetite for knowledge. She and her mother are accused of witchcraft after the death of Sicenga, her half-sister, who has succumbed to a sudden illness. Sicenga’s mother, usually a gentle woman, accuses Lamtana of bewitching her daughter. She shouts “the witches are too strong” in response to Mr Simon, a white shop keeper in the village who owns a car, when he asks Lamtana to assist in transporting Sicenga to the hospital. Sicenga’s mother implies that

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<sup>84</sup> Kuper, *A Witch in My Heart*, 2.

<sup>85</sup> Hilda Kuper, *A Bite of Hunger*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), 193.

Lamtana is able to control the decisions of Mr Simon, thus accusing her of possessing dangerous and evil abilities.<sup>86</sup>

Kuper's attribution to Lamtana of this soliloquy after she is accused allows her readers to sympathise with her female protagonist.

I can't move, I can't cry. Why did Simon speak to me in English? Why did he have to ask me to go with her? How am I different? What have I done? Sicenga, my sister, I wanted to help you. I have done nothing to you.<sup>87</sup>

Lamtana cannot move or cry because her actions will be criticised by the villagers for being insincere. Another reason that she cannot move is because she may be in shock given the sudden and rapid deterioration of Sicenga's health. The multiple questions that she asks are to show her internal confusion, but also to ascertain her innocence. The fact that Lamtana refers to Sicenga as her "sister", reflects the close bond that she shares with her as a fellow Swazi woman in a patriarchal culture, further showing that Lamtana would not wish to cause her any harm.

After Sicenga dies, the village elder Mpisi consults a witchdoctor who confirms the allegations that Lamtana and her mother's witchcraft was indeed the reason behind Sicenga's untimely death. The witchdoctor provides details, stating that "a daughter of a great man" killed Sicenga. The witchdoctor is referring Lamtana, the daughter of a prominent Swazi chief. He further states that her daughter "is also too proud".<sup>88</sup> Lamtana is known in the village for her pride, here too making the descriptions of the witchdoctor accurate. Knowing Lamtana's inner turmoil and then the supposed confirmation of the allegations by the witchdoctor, the reader is left with the sense of injustice about the allegations against Lamtana.

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<sup>86</sup> Hilda Kuper, *A Bite of Hunger*, 189.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 188.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 194.

In both the novel and the play, the two main characters, Bigwapi and Lamtana are depicted as strong and obstinate women, contributing to their alleged witch-like tendencies. This is a point that Nancy J. Schmidt emphasises when she says that “[Kuper] shows how the unusual success of women who deviate from Swazi social norms is interpreted as evidence of witchcraft”.<sup>89</sup>

In the play, for example, Bigwapi shows defiance by challenging the authority of Ntamo, her father-in-law and the head of the homestead. This was taboo in the polygamous and patriarchal social structure of the Swazi homestead. After being banished for allegedly using witchcraft to kill her co-wife’s baby, Bigwapi returns home to plough her fields. She sees that her husband has returned from the mines in Johannesburg. Upon seeing her, her father-in-law sharply orders her to leave. She asks her husband, “Take me back!”, which Ntamo opposes, ordering his son not to allow her to return. Bigwapi then pleads for the intervention of her deeply beloved husband: “Speak for me, my husband. Where will I go? Do not abandon me. Do not turn away your eyes? Oh! You shall suffer as you make me suffer now”.<sup>90</sup> This tension between the demands of “the heart” in a marital bond that is based on love and affection, and the cultural demands of female subordination, under the most unjust of circumstances, is powerfully evoked as a central motif running across the play.

Lamtana too defies the norms of Swazi patriarchy by obstinately refusing to reside with her in-laws, as is the Swazi custom. Although Lamtana did not marry her lover Feka after the birth of their child, she was asked by his parents to live with them, whilst he was completing his education in the city. Lamtana refused. She felt that she would become trapped in Swazi tradition from which she longed to escape. On hearing of Feka’s parents’ request, Lamtana

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<sup>89</sup> Schmidt, “Ethnographic Fiction”, 13.

<sup>90</sup> Kuper, *A Witch in My Heart*, 66.

inwardly professes, “I can’t come here. I don’t want to live here. I don’t care if they do want me. Or how many cattle they give for me. This is not my place”.<sup>91</sup>

Although her reputation is tainted as a young woman who produced a child out of wedlock, Lamtana is not troubled by the fact that Feka’s parents are anxious for her to join their household. Lamtana remains unconcerned about the exchange of livestock for her in a time when the family and the rest of the village are experiencing financial difficulty. This only accentuates extent of her rebellion against the idea of having to go and live with Feka’s parents. Her words, “[t]his is not my place”, can refer to Lamtana feeling uneasy at the thought of moving to Feka’s parents’ hut, but it may also be seen to refer to her more general rejection of traditional Swazi village life.

Lamtana is requested by Feka’s father, Mputuya to move to their home so as to bring some sort of joy in the challenging circumstances. Lamtana’s obstinate and defiant behaviour is further highlighted by her continued refusal to move into the homestead of Feka’s parents, even after Mputuya has contracted a terrible illness. Kuper puts great emphasis on the rather frightening sight of Mputuya as seen through Lamtana’s eyes: “The ridges of the eye-sockets protruded like the lips of a clay bowl, and the balls of his big eyes were yellow and the pupils unnaturally bright”.<sup>92</sup> The use of alliteration of the letter “b” is to draw the reader’s attention to Mputuya’s deteriorating condition, but Kuper also skilfully employs the language appropriate to a Swazi woman’s view of domestic life in her metaphoric reference to “the lips of the clay bowl.”

Kuper introduces a Swazi proverb to illustrate the norms that Lamtana is attempting to subvert. “A son shall bring a wife to waken the ashes of his father’s home”.<sup>93</sup> Kuper does this

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid, 136.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.



not only to give a sense of cultural authenticity to the depiction of traditional Swazi life, but also to show the normality of a wife going to reside in her husband's home, something which Lamtana openly opposes. In response to the proverb, Kuper writes, commenting perhaps both on Lamtana's and her own reflections, "[b]ut in the process, would she not turn herself to ashes".<sup>94</sup> The word "ash" is symbolically associated with grief and death, in contrast to the liveliness that is expected of Lamtana's presence in her in-laws' home. Lamtana's view is that she herself will lose her ambitions and dreams, and therefore turn to ash if she remains with her in-laws.<sup>95</sup> Lamtana's role is cast as "her duty", an obligatory act which she is expected to fulfil, but defiantly chooses not to.<sup>96</sup>

In both the novel and the play, therefore, Kuper artfully establishes a dual system of judgement. The reader following the playwright would have to acknowledge that her two female protagonists are strong-willed and courageous in their insistence on following their own vision of their life paths. But from the perspective of traditionalists in Swazi culture, the male patriarchs and compliant co-wives, they are merely obstinate and deluded. Their defiance is condemned as witchcraft, making it possible for society to banish them for challenging its gender norms.

Bigwapi and Lamtana are ultimately both accused of murder through witchcraft, giving the male elders of their villages reason to banish them. This dual perspective generates the creative tension at the heart of these accomplished works of creative writing. It does this by inducing the reader to feel the intense injustice of the accusations against these two women of courage, but also to appreciate their powerlessness in combatting deeply held beliefs and values.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 160.



## Love and Jealousy

As hinted above, Kuper also explores the theme of romantic love in both the novel and the play. In *A Witch in my Heart*, Sikova's parents, Ntamo and Nabo Sikova, converse about Bigwapi. His mother states that although Sikova treats all three of his wives equally in terms of land division and making sure their needs are met, he holds a special place in "his heart" for Bigwapi. Sikova's mother says: "his desires I cannot divide for him - his heart pushes him where I cannot guide". Ntamo replies: "There he is foolish - jealousy grows where too much love is shown, for women do not reason".<sup>97</sup>

From this discussion between Sikova's parents, one can see that they are concerned about the jealousy between Sikova's wives, which has been caused by his depth of passion for Bigwapi. For Ntamo, jealousy is the natural result of excessive affection, an emotional imbalance that runs counter to cultural norms. He claims to have warned Sikova, "but still he spends more nights with her whose womb was never filled".<sup>98</sup> From this one can deduce that Bigwapi is judged by her in-laws for not being able to produce children. The love that Sikova has for her is misunderstood, as the purpose of a wife is to strengthen the family by providing offspring.

In Scene II Act I, Bigwapi tells her sister, Lomusa, that she was ecstatically happy when she first got married, but that things have changed. The reader is invited to identify with her and her expression of growing unhappiness. This is seen from her words, "now I hear those sad songs in my heart all the time". She starts to cry. Her sister pleads with her not to cry, to which Bigwapi replies, "In front of *you* I don't mind if I weep. In front of *them* I must pretend my heart is a grind-stone which, when they strike, becomes only sharper".<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Kuper, *A Witch in My Heart*, 3 and 4.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 11 and 12.

The fact that Kuper italicises the words “*you*” and “*them*”, is to emphasise the close relationship that she shares with her family, and the distant one with her in-laws. For this reason Bigwapi feels comfortable showing her pain to her sister, but feels it is necessary to show her emotional strength to her co-wives, to prove that their words do not hurt her. The metaphoric use of the word “grind-stone” is another skilful technique by Kuper of locating the dialogue of the two women within a traditional socio-economic context.

The word “heart” is repeated in this scene and throughout the play, echoing its title. The reader gets a glimpse into the underlying emotional complexity and suffering that can arise from polygamous marriages in Swaziland. Bigwapi becomes a victim of jealousy due primarily to the immense love that she receives from her husband. Ultimately, it is this that causes her prolonged suffering.

In the same scene Bigwapi and Sikova engage in a deep conversation, confirming the allegations that Bigwapi is indeed the most favoured wife. In the dialogue between the couple, they discuss an idea proposed by Ntamo, that Lomusa, Sikova’s prospective fourth wife, carry the child that Bigwapi cannot produce. Sikova consults Bigwapi on the matter, asking her opinion. This in itself is an act of love, as Sikova does not require the permission of his wives to take on another.<sup>100</sup> Bigwapi’s jealousy comes through when she says, “you might love me less”.<sup>101</sup> Sikova assures her by saying:

No it is not so. I am a ripe man now and know myself. For me you will have no equal. It will always be as when I found you at the King’s dance. Though I knew you were betrothed to another, I could not stop. My first wife, chosen for me by my father, wiped away the darkness of my youth. I respect her as a mother and do not criticise her, but you and I are one. I have no need for others to rejoice my body. If I take girls, it is not for joy, but to increase the home. That is why, should the little LaHlope have a son, we can all be thankful.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Kuper, *Ibid*, 13 and 14.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*.

From Sikova's words the reader gets a glimpse into the relationship that the couple share. Sikova admits that auspiciously they first met at "The Kings Dance", or Incwala ritual which Kuper had documented at chapter length in *An African Aristocracy*. Bigwapi is his most beloved, as she has "no equal". He only agreed to marry his first wife for the sake of his father. However, marrying Bigwapi was an act of love. He likens his relationship with the eldest wife to a maternal one, creating an intimate distance between them. By contrast, he tells Bigwapi that "you and I are one". The reader can then judge whether the jealousy between the wives is justified. Bigwapi cannot have children but has the love and affection of Sikova, whereas the eldest wife can produce children but does not have the romantic admiration from him.

The themes of love and jealousy in the play are therefore complex, multi-layered and charged with emotion. The intensity of the love between Sikova and Bigwapi comes through strongly, exposing the tensions and contradictions that arise in polygamous marriages in traditional villages and homesteads across Swaziland. From the creative writing of Kuper, these tensions are depicted skilfully showing humanistic emotions that standard anthropological monographs simply cannot explore with the same kind of nuance and depth.

In *A Bite of Hunger* the theme of love comes through differently, as Lamtana is conflicted between her love for Feka and her hunger for an education and a future outside the village. Feka is a young, Swazi man pursuing a formal education. Lamtana is attracted to his mind, always questioning him on his experiences in the city.<sup>103</sup> This is evident in the intimate moments between Feka and Lamtana at the river side. Feka tells her, "[l]et me taste your sweetness". It is only when he proceeds to say, "Lamtana, I promise you that in Goli [Johannesburg] they say what we are doing is uncivilised. It does not help you...". His use of the English term "uncivilised" is a marker of his status as an educated young Swazi man able

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<sup>103</sup> Kuper, *A Bite of Hunger*, 129.

to reflect on English concepts about the Swazi and other African “tribes”. It is only after hearing Feka speak English that she agrees to be intimate with him. It is because “he had learnt so much” that she “became weak with longing and curiosity”.<sup>104</sup>

Soon after Feka and Lamtana’s private encounter, it was time for him to depart back to the city. Although Feka “left with deep sadness”, due to his growing affection for Lamtana, she seemed less emotional towards him. “[S]he was surprised to find that she missed him less than before. The bodily longing was great, but she had built a more complete world into which she could escape, and of which he was not always part”. She then writes in her diary which she calls, “her book of thots [thoughts]”, that she does not feel sad about Feka leaving. Instead, she has “the bite of hunger, but it is not for meat, it is for learning”.<sup>105</sup>

These words affirm Lamtana’s inner conflict between her romantic love for Feka and her desire to escape traditional culture through the world of learning and books. In the end the bite of Lamtana’s hunger for an education exceeds her love for Feka. She is willing to part with him to pursue the life that she longs for and succeeds in escaping her traditional life for a life in the city.

The love that the two leading female characters experience is different in many ways.

Bigwapi longs for the right to have a passionate relationship with Sikova (and ideally to share a child). The younger Lamtana longs for a future beyond the village life outside the bounds of tradition. Yet in both cases the motif of love serves to humanise, and for the predominantly Western and educated Swazi readership for whom the play and novel were written, to encourage readers to identify with the intense aspirations and inner lives of these two remarkable and courageous Swazi women.

### **Colonial Modernity**

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 130.

*A Witch in My Heart* and *A Bite of Hunger* are not only about the emotional complexities of traditional Swazi households. As the story of Lamtana suggests, Kuper was also keenly interested in the theme of colonial modernity. Of consequence is that Kuper's delayed 1942 L.S.E. doctoral thesis of 692 pages had paid equal attention to tradition and social change, divided into two books published in 1947.<sup>106</sup> It is not surprising then that in her creative writing Kuper also explores the tensions that arise between the new colonial systems and the traditional rules that govern Swazi village life. As in her analyses of aspects of tradition, witchcraft and love, she seeks to convey the pain and suffering that Swazi people endure as a result of often unwanted social change. She again brings depth and attention to the human dimension that she felt the standard forms of ethnographic writing, whether monographs as taught by Malinowski, or structuralist theorists, were unable to convey.

In *A Witch in My Heart*, Kuper identifies colonial taxes as a burdensome imposition on Swazi culture, to the point where families are broken up as sons and fathers in the homestead had to leave the villages to find work in the city. This was a theme that she had analysed at length in *A Uniform of Colour*,<sup>107</sup> but in her play she could give it a human face and form.

Sikova and his father are called by the colonial District Officer for a meeting, in which they are asked to sell their cattle to pay taxes. Ntamo says, "the [colonial officers] will destroy us, never will I agree to sell my cattle. They are our life".<sup>108</sup> From this one can deduce that Swazi traditionalists are more deeply averse to the new rules brought by the colonial regime. Cattle are considered as the most valuable asset in Swazi culture. Therefore trading them for money is deemed a major loss for the homestead. Sikova requests permission from his father to go to the dangerous Johannesburg mines to earn money to pay taxes for the homestead, despite the

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<sup>106</sup> Bank, *Pioneers of the Field*, 205

<sup>107</sup> Kuper, *Uniform of Colour*.

<sup>108</sup> Kuper, *A Witch in My Heart*, 16.

fact that his brother had died in a mining accident. Ntamo responds with an emotional outburst:

Never! I agree that you can go away to work in the town, but I will never agree that you go down the hole! Do you want to die, as your own brother born of your mother died? Who will then look after your wives? You shall not go to the mines!<sup>109</sup>

He is vehemently opposed to the idea that his only surviving son will now also put his life at risk by going to work in the mines in Johannesburg. For Ntamo the mines are associated only with death. Sikova's mother shares the same sentiments as her husband, and asks why men of the village choose to go to the city. The patriarch Ntamo sarcastically replies, "Does money come from you to pay tax?"<sup>110</sup>

In *A Bite of Hunger*, this vexatious theme of taxes also emerges when the young men of the village go to the District Commissioner to pay their taxes. Upon hearing that some men from the village are not present to pay their taxes, Mr Tootles "petulantly" complains that "too many people are ill or too old or dead today"<sup>111</sup>. His very name is a caricature: to toot is to hoot or to drink. The name "Tootles" has a Dickensian ring about it. The fact that he complains "petulantly" implies that his attitude towards hearing the misfortune and suffering of the people of the village is one of annoyance rather than empathy. This provides commentary on the lack of compassion that the colonial administrators typically showed towards Swazi villagers.

Although the villagers are required to pay taxes, and risk their lives by obtaining the finances to do so, they are not convinced that their money is being utilised to their benefit. On their way home from the district office, one of the men, Lubelo, says that "the roads are made by white men for their cars. They know what they want our money for"<sup>112</sup>. During the 1930s in

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Kuper, *A Witch in My Heart*, 19.

<sup>111</sup> Kuper, *A Bite of Hunger*, 170.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 171.

Swaziland, apart from Sobhuza II's famous, all other cars were only owned by white people. Building roads did not benefit the Swazi who travelled mostly on foot. Roads took male migrant labourers away from their homesteads by bus.

Feka is excused from paying taxes as he does not gain an income, due to the fact that he is still a student. Timba, however, a friend of Feka, is required to pay tax as he is a working adult. In order to obtain the money to pay taxes, Timba too is sucked into the labour recruitment machine of the colonial government. Upon receiving his papers from the district commissioner, he knew that "the work was hard and dangerous, and the white man would not let him stop when he wanted, but when his time was up."<sup>113</sup> These words once again assert the sentiments that the mining industry was a tremendously threatening occupation, causing both physical and emotional pain, which Swazi men committed themselves to for the purpose of paying their taxes. The system of migrant labour was also destroying the traditional social structures, most notably those of family life as the play and novel explore.

Medicine is another central theme associated with colonial modernity, notably in the contrast between colonial medicine and traditional healing. In *A Witch in My Heart* Bigwapi's inability to produce children prompts the use of traditional medicine men and witchdoctors to treat her. Ntamo tells his wife, "My cattle kraal is empty from paying medicine-men brought by our son to cure her".<sup>114</sup> Traditional medicine proves expensive and Ntamo's homestead feels the financial burden of Bigwapi's barrenness. However, the topic of utilising modern medicine does not emerge.

In *A Bite of Hunger*, however, it becomes evident that the villages become acquainted with modern medicine. In the novel, before Mputuya succumbs to his wasting illness, he tells Lamtana that "the white mine doctor thought he could cure me, but he only saw part of the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>114</sup> Kuper, *A Witch in My Heart*, 3.



truth. He didn't see that before the cough came I had already been killed".<sup>115</sup> From these words one can see that the villagers understand modern medicine to treat physical symptoms, while traditional medicine heals the sicknesses caused by sinister spells and witchcraft. The fact that the modern doctor "saw part of the truth" means that some Swazi villages did see benefit in modern medicine, as the word "truth" connotes to certainty, meaning that modern medicine treats symptoms that can be seen.

When Lamtana's half sister, Sicenga falls terribly ill, a traditional healer is called to cure her. He mixes up a concoction of herbs and then proceeds to take a "rusty" knife and make slits on her forehead. It is interesting that Kuper states the knife to be rusty, as rusted tools for the purpose of medical incisions on the body may lead to infections that may cause more harm to the patient. The reader is left to decide if the efforts of the witchdoctor are beneficial to Sicenga or not. The witchdoctor spent three days attempting to cure Sicenga with traditional remedies. However, she grew weaker and weaker with each passing day, until one day the chief called for Mr. Simon the shopkeeper to transport her to the hospital in the capital city Mbane.<sup>116</sup>

Simon and his Swazi wife then rush her to the hospital in his car. Upon their arrival, the doctor who examines Sicenga tells Simon, "I'm afraid she hasn't a chance... Encephalitis on top of blackwater. It's usually fatal, unless diagnosed immediately". The doctor's words are then followed by the narrator claiming that "he grew angry and intense". The doctor proceeds to say, "they always do this to me. They send the cases that are too far gone for us to cure and then give us the reputation of being a darn sight worse than their own *nyangas*".<sup>117</sup> The use of "blackwater" and "a darn sight worse", is Kuper's literary technique to capture the language of the British settler in Swaziland.

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<sup>115</sup> Kuper, *A Bite of Hunger*, 159.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 184 and 186.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 191.

The doctor's grim words about Sicenga not having a chance is tragic based on her tender age. He also conveys the news of her death in a nonchalant manner, which suggests that he is no stranger to death and fatal diseases in a location that mostly relies on traditional methods of healing. Sicenga's cause of death is Encephalitis, or the swelling of the brain due to infectious diseases, and blackwater. Here the clash between modern and traditional medicine is most evident, as Sicenga's fatal illness would have been curable through modern medicine. The reader learns that had Sicenga been rushed to the hospital earlier, and had the witchdoctors not wasted time trying to cure her through traditional means, she may have survived. The immense pain and suffering that the characters experience due to Sicenga's sudden passing could have thus been avoided.<sup>118</sup>

Much like the theme of modern medicine, western education is more deeply explored in the novel than the play. The only reference to it in the play is when Sikova meets Ferninand, a Swazi man working as a messenger in the city. Ferninand asks Sikova if he can read after hearing that Sikova has come to the city in search of work. Sikova's response is, "No. I wanted to go to school but I had to herd the cattle".<sup>119</sup> The theme is then overshadowed by the issues that emerge from the allegation of witchcraft on the female characters.

The novel explores the colonial education system more in-depth, with the main character's insatiable appetite for learning. When Lamtana's mother and her co-wives discuss the topic of the children attending school, as suggested by Lamtana, the mothers disagree. Two of the co-wives do not see any benefit in girls pursuing knowledge beyond the homestead. Lamtana's mother however, believes that the only way to succeed against the colonial system is through western schooling. She says,

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<sup>118</sup> This extract echoes Kuper's short story titled, *The Tooth*, where a child becomes ill due to an infected and rotten tooth but is prevented, by the elders in the homestead from receiving medical attention. Instead the male patriarchs obstinately insist that the child seek a cure by traditional healers, until she nears death, at which stage they accept modern intervention in Bank, *Pioneers of the Field*, 215.

<sup>119</sup>Kuper, *A Witch in My Heart*, 27.

“Look at all the books in the office in Mbane. Enough to fill this whole hut with trouble. Pass-books, Case-books, Cattle books, Marriage books. If you can’t read, you put your thumb in ink like this [...]and before you know what you’ve done you’ve sold yourself to the white man”.<sup>120</sup>

Lamtana’s mother’s reason for agreeing to send the girls to school is so that they are not taken advantage of by the colonial administration. She claims that they document all the details of the village in books. Since the villagers cannot read or write, they are forced to adhere to the conditions documented by the system without the possibility of challenging it.

Lamtana’s enthusiasm for attending the missionary school is conveyed when Kuper writes, “At first she was wildly enthusiastic; even when it rained, and the children nearest the school stayed at home. [...] She would have liked to be the first to come and the last to leave”.<sup>121</sup>

Lamtana’s keenness and interest is expressed by the words, “wildly enthusiastic”, which is in contrast to the general disinterest and suspicion that the colonial education system is met with.

Furthermore, the theme of social change is seen as a means for Lamtana to escape village life, therefore being a symbol of hope and freedom.

A new world was opening for her, a world of which she had received a few vivid glimpses. A young schoolboy reading a letter to a group of illiterate elders, including her own father; a woman cutting dresses by pattern and sewing on a machine; things beyond imagination pictured in a pile of books and magazines. [...] She wanted to know more. She began to visit the Simons’ house more frequently [...]. Both Simons found it pleasant to while away an hour or so with a listener so eager to hear about “styles” and “city life” and “the world” at large.<sup>122</sup>

In the end of the novel, Lamtana chooses modernity over tradition and plans to escape to the city with Gladys, Mr. Simon’s wife. A sullen Lamtana goes to visit Gladys at her shop after receiving a cold reception from Feka’s mother who would not even invite her inside her home. Gladys pours her some tea and hears about the unfriendly visit and her thoughts on

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<sup>120</sup>Kuper, *A Bite of Hunger*, 43.

<sup>121</sup> Kuper, *A Bite of Hunger*, 92 and 93.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 94 and 95.

being ostracised by the people in her village. Kuper then writes, “Suddenly came the inspiration, blinding and dazzling. ‘I will go away. I will go to Goli. I will find Feka, and if he doesn’t want me, I won’t care. I will work for myself in town. I am afraid for my own life in this place where everyone hates me’”.<sup>123</sup> Lamtana seems excited and hopeful at the prospect of running away to the city and leaving behind her family, including her son. This is in contrast to Sikova who exiles himself to the city after Bigwapi’s accusation of witchcraft. He sees the city as a place of suffering, condemning himself to a life of solitude and misery.<sup>124</sup> This then shows Lamtana’s acceptance of modernity and her eagerness to escape the traditional Swazi life and become an independent and educated modern woman.

Gladys warns Lamtana, “[y]our father will bring you back”, to which Lamtana counters: “No, he won’t. I’ll be in a white man’s place. Even if he finds me, he can’t force me back. I will be free”.<sup>125</sup> Lamtana feels that the “white mans” laws will serve as her protection against her father if he ever tries to coerce her to return to the village. She does not fear being alone in a city, as it seems to be a better option than being psychologically imprisoned in Swazi traditions. She then invites Gladys to join her. Gladys, already frustrated at her husband’s hostility and his unsavoury drinking habits, eventually agrees. The two follow through with the plan to pack their belongings and depart by bus to the city, marking the end of the novel.

### **Conclusion**

Both the novel and play are laden with the humanistic experiences that Kuper witnessed during her fieldwork in Swaziland. Following her academic writing for her doctoral thesis, she explored her creativity based on humanistic themes such as love and jealousy. Instead of monotonously discussing the theme of witchcraft, Kuper managed to skilfully depict the emotional effects that it causes within Swazi families, making the reader empathetic towards

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 201.

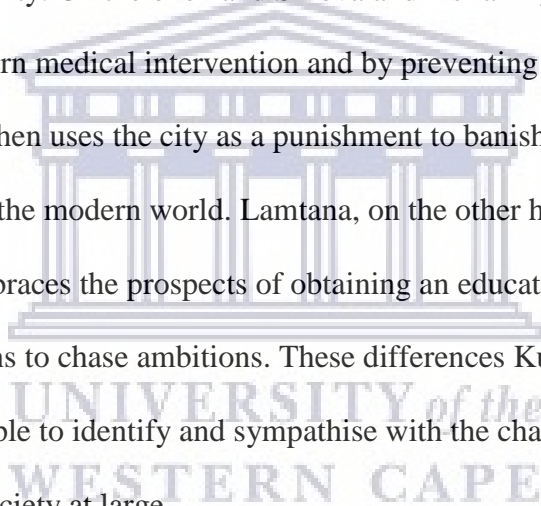
<sup>124</sup> Kuper, *A Witch in My Heart*, 67.

<sup>125</sup> Kuper, *A Bite of Hunger*, 201.

the characters. One cannot help but feel deep sympathy towards the female protagonists, Bigwapi and Lamtana.

Kuper also manages to portray the theme of love and jealousy, often omitted from traditional, ethnographic monographs, which has been discussed through a close reading of her two creative fiction works. By deconstructing the language one is able to see the nuances in emotion and human suffering that people endure within a Swazi society, through traditional Swazi practices, such as witchcraft and polygamy.

Finally in the novel in particular Kuper explores the different ways that Swazi villagers respond to colonial modernity. On the one hand Sikova and his family reject modernity entirely, by rejecting modern medical intervention and by preventing sikova from seeking a formal education. Sikova then uses the city as a punishment to banish himself to, showing the negativity associated with the modern world. Lamtana, on the other hand, accepts the changes brought by modernity, embraces the prospects of obtaining an education, and sees the city as a place of hope and a means to chase ambitions. These differences Kuper skilfully conveys in her creative works for people to identify and sympathise with the characters, and more specifically, with Swazi society at large.



## Chapter Two

### The Heart of Ethnography: Humanistic Themes in Edith Turner's *The Spirit and the Drum: A Memoir of Africa* (1987)

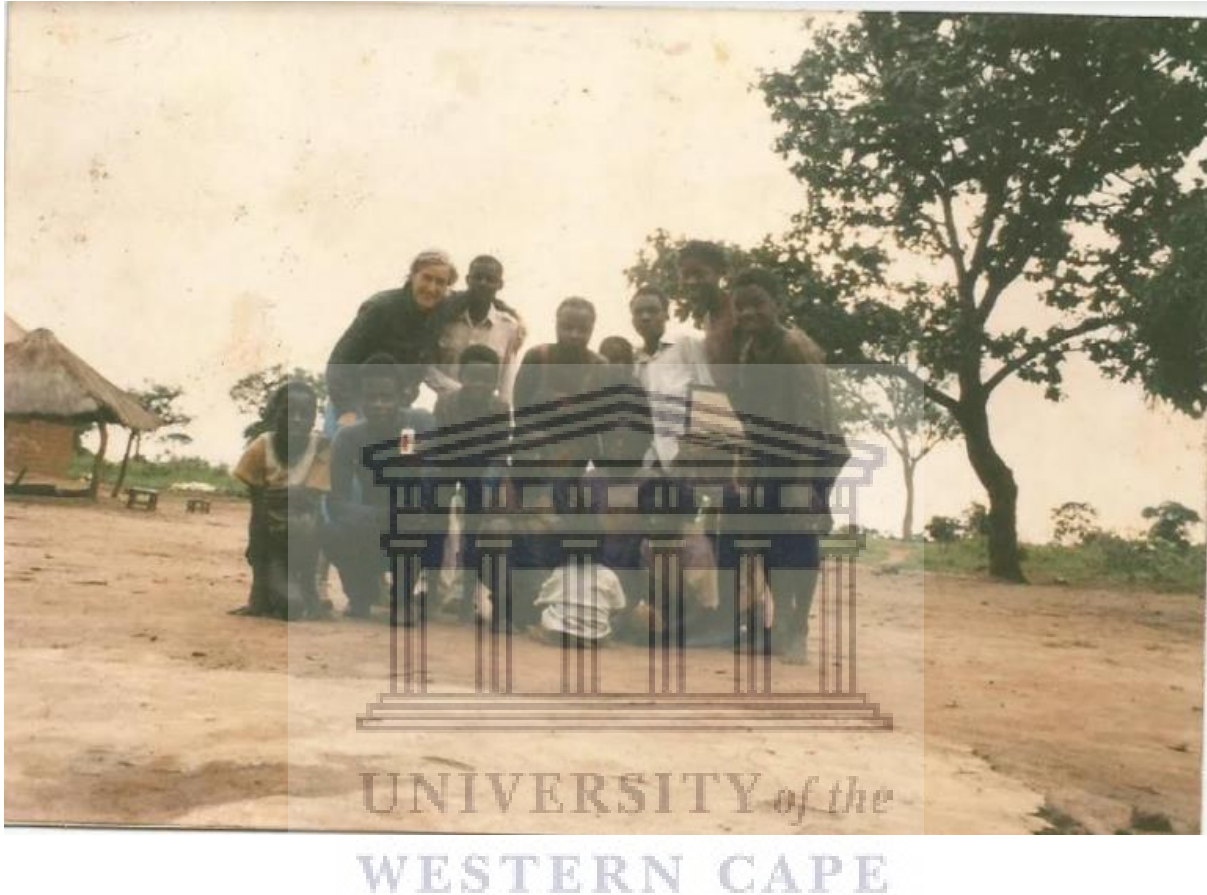


Figure 2: Edith Turner with her arm around Muchona the Hornet, her husband Victor's famous research assistant, Kajima Village, 1985. This photograph was one of ten hanging on the wall of Muchona the Hornet's son when my supervisor Andrew Bank did a fieldtrip to Mwinilungu in June 2018.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Thanks to Andrew Bank for this image.



This chapter provides a close critical analysis of Edith Turner's 165 page novel, *The Spirit and the Drum: A Memoir of Africa*, published in 1987 by the University of Arizona Press.<sup>127</sup>

Edith Turner was a highly talented writer, but typically under-acknowledged. She had conducted fieldwork in Kajima Village in the north-western part of Northern Rhodesia from 1952 to 1954, while accompanying her husband, Victor Turner, as his research assistant. She had also taken a later month long field expedition in 1985 after his death.<sup>128</sup> Turner mastered the skills of fieldwork without any formal anthropological training, nor a university degree. She became an accomplished woman ethnographer using experimental fiction as just one genre in a prolific late-life career as a writer. Turner wrote this novel in draft form in Manchester during the late 1950s,<sup>129</sup> in the years immediately after returning from the field with her family, but for reasons that will become clear as her life story unfolds, it would take a further thirty years before she finally saw it through to publication.<sup>130</sup>

Turner has been remembered by a few historians of anthropology for her collaborative contribution to the career of her more famous husband. A former student of Edith Turner's from her years teaching at the University of Virginia in the early 1990s, the anthropologist of religion Matthew Engelke, published a series of interviews with Turner and a seminal essay on her collaborative work with her husband. His essay and interviews reveal that Turner played a hidden, but highly significant role in the co-production of her husband's texts, particularly his famous doctoral thesis published in 1958 by Manchester University Press as *Schism and Continuity in An African Society*.<sup>131</sup> Some historians of anthropology regard it as one of the landmark texts in the theoretical development of the Gluckman-led Manchester

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<sup>127</sup> Edith Turner, *The Spirit and the Drum: A Memoir of Africa* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987).

<sup>128</sup> See figure 2.

<sup>129</sup> She would have very likely rubbed shoulders there with a visiting Simons Fellowship Scholar, Hilda Kuper who was busy writing her own novel, *A Bite of Hunger*, also delayed in publication.

<sup>130</sup> Edith Turner, *Heart of Lightness: The Life Story of an Anthropologist* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

<sup>131</sup> Matthew Engelke, 'The Endless Conversation: Fieldwork, Writing and the Marriage of Victor and Edith Turner' in Richard Handler, ed., *Significant Others: Impersonal and Professional Commitments in Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 6-49.



School within the British tradition of social anthropology. Thus Richard Werbner claims that: “To put it briefly, *Schism and Continuity* was at once on the crest of one wave, on conflict resolution, and a force for movement in the alternative directions of transactionalism and more interpretive approaches such as symbolic interaction”.<sup>132</sup> Engelke demonstrates that Turner continued to support her husband’s career, taking part in seminars at Manchester University and then from 1963, at the University of Chicago where he took up a post in 1963. She wrote a draft of *The Spirit and the Drum* as early as the late 1950s, but it languished unpublished as her own career always remained in the shadow of his now increasingly public role as a leading social and cultural anthropologist.

Victor Turner has rightly come to be regarded as one of the most significant theorists of ritual in twentieth century social science with his 1967 book *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of the Ndembo Ritual* often regarded as *the* seminal statement in the symbolic interpretation of ritual.<sup>133</sup> Significantly, it was only in the years immediately after her husband’s death due to a heart attack in 1983, for which she blamed academia, that Turner returned to her Kajima field-site in 1985 and eventually published *The Spirit and the Drum*.<sup>134</sup>

In the subsections that follow, I begin by locating Turner’s novel in the context of her own life history, as told in her late life autobiography *The Heart of Lightness* (2005). The narrative will be supplemented by published interviews conducted and transcribed by Engelke.<sup>135</sup> Here I am interested in reading the autobiography, not for its narrative craft of which there is

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<sup>132</sup> Richard Werbner, “The Manchester School in South-Central Africa”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 13, 1984, 176; see his subsection on ‘The Interactionist Strand: Transaction or Symbolic Interaction’, 176-178.. For a more general account of Victory Turner’s work but one which, curiously, makes no mention at all of Matthew Engelke’s well-documented insights into its co-production and Edith Turner’s role in that process see Harriet D. Lyons, ‘Victor W. Turner’ in Robert Gordon, Andrew P. Lyons and Harriet D. Lyons, eds., *Fifty Key Anthropologists* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 229-233.

<sup>133</sup> Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembo Ritual* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967).

<sup>134</sup> Edith Turner, *Heart of Lightness: The Life Story of an Anthropologist* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005).

<sup>135</sup> Turner, *Heart of Lightness*; Matthew Engelke, “An Interview with Edith Turner”, *Current Anthropology*, 41(5), 2000, 843-852.

undoubtedly rich evidence, but simply in order to provide background information about the personal and intellectual context within which to locate my detailed and sequential critical reading of seven of the nine chapters of her novel.

The novel will be the central point of focus of the chapter, with particular attention to its highly experimental narrative structure. It is experimental in its inclusion of the anthropologist within the fieldwork frame, and its unusual focus on aspects of women's experiences by means of successive descriptions of women's rituals, and most importantly, I engage with what I interpret as its profoundly humanist ethos. This is in keeping with Turner's late career quest to explore what she called "the anthropology of experience".

### **Losing One's Heart to Anthropology and An Anthropologist**

Edith Davis Turner (1921-2016) grew up in Ely, a cathedral town some fifty kilometres north of Cambridge. She grew up in a middle class, Christian home with a strict mother, a pious father and no fewer than seven siblings. Her early childhood seemed pleasant in retrospect and she recollected the times when she and her siblings went frolicking in Ely River, climbing trees, and exploring the garden of their Victorian home. Her relationship with literature started after her arrival at boarding school at the age of eight. There she was ostracised by wealthy classmates from aristocratic families. She resorted to reading literature to escape the taunts, earning her nickname "bookworm".<sup>136</sup>

From the age of thirteen she attended Perse School for Girls in Cambridge where she received similar treatment. She described her experience as "anti-communitas". Communitas is a term that she adopted much later from her husband, Victor, one he had developed in his writings of the 1960s. The concept refers to an ethos of togetherness, love and inclusivity.<sup>137</sup>

Turner becomes almost obsessed with recovering moments of communitas in her late

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<sup>136</sup> Turner, *Heart of Lightness*, 17.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

recollection of her life. Conversely she rejects aspects that restrict communitas, for example, the Anglican Church that her family belonged to which she despised for its strict codes and disregard for love.<sup>138</sup>

After completing high school in 1939, Turner worked with her brother Charlie as a non-combatant army worker in Oxford. She was just sixteen when World War II broke out and she was given a job of tending vegetable gardens. This is a humble occupation after what she describes as her rebellious, moody teenage phase, whereby she distanced herself from the conservative ideology of her parents and showed a growing interest in communism. She also recalls having shown a precocious interest in feminism, reading Bernard Shaw, Henri Bergson and Rimbaud.<sup>139</sup> The latter was a big influence, as she claims that he saw the “immense beauty of the world if you weren’t hedged in by conventions”. This is an echo of Turner’s philosophy of loving deeply and ignoring protocols, a philosophy which gave her a second nickname, “bohemian”,<sup>140</sup> one to which she seems to have remained true across her unconventional life.

It was during these war years that she met her future husband, Victor, who was instrumental in her turn to anthropology. They met Victor in the summer of 1942 in Carfax, Oxford, a meeting set up by Charlie who shared the same army unit as Victor. Turner and Victor shared interests in politics and literature. Non-combatants like Victor read as much as they could. He discovered Margaret Mead and Radcliffe-Brown’s anthropology.<sup>141</sup> He found *Coming of Age in Samoa* and *Growing Up in New Guinea* by Mead, and Radcliffe-Brown’s *Andaman*

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>140</sup> Matthew Engelke, “An Interview with Edith Turner”, 844.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

*Islanders* particularly fascinating. He was drawn by their rich descriptions of rituals, social systems and human interaction.<sup>142</sup>

They fell in love within the short space of two weeks. Turner recalled the process as “a dramatic infiltration of her being.” She says that “the ‘I’ in me was ionized, tingling. You might say bells rang. I found I was being broken down and reconstructed all over again differently”.<sup>143</sup> The couple got married six months later with a few close friends present. The humble reception at a restaurant was an example of “*communitas*”.

They lived a sparse life in the years after their marriage owing to their modest occupations. After the birth of their first child Freddie, in 1943, they bought a gypsy caravan and moved to a farm near Victor’s work. They lived off the earth, planting crops and following a subsistence lifestyle.<sup>144</sup> It was Victor’s interest in wanting to do anthropological research and the war ending that prompted his decision to return to University College London to continue his B.A. degree under an army grant.<sup>145</sup> He then changed his college major from English to anthropology, because there were “direct studies being made of actual people across the globe, much in their lives being startlingly different”.<sup>146</sup> While Victor studied, Turner was occupied with raising their children. Aside from Freddie, it now included Robert born in 1945 and Rene born in 1947.<sup>147</sup> Turner had two more children, Lucy, a Down Syndrome baby born in 1960 who only lived for five months, and Alex who was born in 1961.<sup>148</sup>

In the late 1940s, Turner’s daily rounds included the homely chores of cooking, cleaning, washing and tending to the children’s daily needs. It was only when Victor became ill and was forced to study from home for two weeks that he “conveyed to [her] all the anthropology

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Edith Turner, *Heart of Lightness*, 32.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 90.

he learned”. While preparing food, washing clothes and cleaning, Victor, her only professor, kept her interested in his “day-long seminars”. Together they became “consumed by anthropology, discussing it day and night”.<sup>149</sup>

This is when Victor met Max Gluckman who Turner describes as a Marxist, and Marxism was a theory that Victor was very much interested in. Gluckman was due to take up a professorship at Victoria University in Manchester having returned to England after five years in Northern Rhodesia as the second director of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. He offered Victor a grant “to do research [from 1952 onwards] into the very heart of human society”.<sup>150</sup>

Turner’s strong bond with her husband and Victor’s access to a postgraduate grant in African studies for field research drove their decision to conduct fieldwork in Central Africa. This involved moving her family to Kajima village just outside the town of Mwinilungu in the far north-west of Northern Rhodesia. There they spent two years divided into two expeditions in 1952-53 and 1953 to 54. Turner showed remarkable courage in being willing to be uprooted from her life in England and moving her very young children across the world to a distant continent.<sup>151</sup>

Turner plunged into fieldwork, first as designated field photographer for her husband and then after gaining the trust of the women in the village, conducting fieldwork of her own by documenting women’s rituals including the “coming out ceremonies” for girls. During the day she rapidly jotted down notes in field diaries and fulfilled her role as photographer for Victor. In the evenings when the children were asleep she typed out her and Victor’s notes.<sup>152</sup>

Knowing Turner’s stance on love, acceptance and “communitas”, it is clear that she

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<sup>149</sup> Engelke, “An Interview with Edith Turner”, 844.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

flourished in the field among the Ndembu women. They accepted her into their circle, discussing their most intimate secrets with her, including their ideas and experiences of sex and polygamy. Turner became increasingly “interested in capturing what the women felt”, and later came to reflect that this was “missing in anthropology”.

After their return to England, in 1954 she came to feel that mainstream anthropology, as she encountered it through the writings of her husband, beginning with his Manchester University Ph.D. (1957), of which she had “first-hand” knowledge, was too serious with too much emphasis placed on “cold” methods. Her aim as an anthropologist was therefore to enhance the aspect of emotion and “human sympathy”. She found that one way of doing this was to foreground the experience of African women, or what she called “on the ground anthropology”.<sup>153</sup> This approach was echoed in her manuscript which lay for thirty years unpublished, first under the title “Kajima”, later becoming her novel *The Spirit and the Drum*.

Why did her manuscript remain unpublished for thirty years? One reason was due to her lack of confidence as an independent anthropologist. She considered her husband as the “real” anthropologist, owing to his formal and more advanced education while she worked as his research assistant in the field and then at home, helping him with the writing up process. It was, after all, his work that got published and his papers that were presented at seminars. She saw herself as a “junior anthropologist... who was not shaped by the mills of university”.<sup>154</sup> Women fieldworkers were sometimes merely regarded as “untrained wives”.<sup>155</sup> It is clear that Turner had, to a large extent internalised this opinion.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 846.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 849.

<sup>155</sup> Matthew Engelke, “Books Can Be Deceiving: Edith Turner and the Problem of Categories in Anthropology”, *Anthropology and Humanism*, 26 (2), 2002, 126.

It was only in the 1980s, after the age of 60, that she had gained a considerable amount of experience of university studies. It was now that she received a Master's degree in English literature at the University of Virginia.

Another significant influence had been her experience of writing for the feminist journal *Primavera* in the 1970s, publishing poetry and articles. She devoted a significant amount of time and effort to this journal.<sup>156</sup> The death of Victor from a heart attack in 1983 was also a catalyst of a personal kind, as she returned to the field in 1985, and then subsequently to rewriting her novel, "Kajima" to the current version, *The Spirit and the Drum*.<sup>157</sup>

While Victor's death was a catalyst, wider trends in anthropology in the United States were also significant. As noted in the introduction, James Clifford and George Marcus published their famous edited *Writing Culture* in 1986.<sup>158</sup> In general, there was an intense interest for the first time in ethnography as an exercise in representation rather than a fieldwork-based form of sociological analysis. One of the central debates in this period, as noted earlier, was the status of women ethnographers in a male-dominated "canon" with a volume on *Women Writing Culture*, being published in 1993 in reaction to the perceived androcentrism of Clifford's work.<sup>159</sup> *A Biographical Dictionary on Women Anthropologists* was published in New York in 1988.<sup>160</sup> It did not include Turner, but did include Hilda Kuper and many other women ethnographers of African cultures. Therefore the confluence of a new recognition of the hidden role of women ethnographers and fresh interest in the literary dimensions of anthropology also explains why there was an American market for her book, although these

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 848.

<sup>157</sup> Engelke, "Books Can Be Deceiving", 128.

<sup>158</sup> James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>159</sup> For discussion of the American feminist anthropologist's challenge to Clifford and his notion of the canon see Andrew Bank, 'Rethinking the Canon' in *Pioneers of the Field: South Africa's Women Anthropologists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1-2.

<sup>160</sup> See Ute Gacs et al, *Women Anthropologists: A Biographical Dictionary*.



are not issues she herself explicitly addresses in her autobiographical account of the genesis and belated publication of *The Spirit and The Drum*.

As in the case of Hilda Kuper the concept of “humanism” was of significance to Turner. Like Kuper, she had been involved in the *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly* which began publishing in the 1980s. Turner felt that “Good anthropology rests on humanism”. Her definition of it referred to “respect for the ideas and religions of other cultures, and where possible the willingness to experience through the eyes of others”.<sup>161</sup>

As we will see below, Turner shone her role as an anthropologist of humanism among the Ndembu people. There is no clearer expression of this than in *The Spirit and the Drum*, was written with an emphasis on human experience, the human “spirit”, but conveyed through an experimental form of narrative.

### **Introducing *The Spirit and the Drum*: An Experimental Work of Humanistic Anthropology**

*The Spirit and the Drum* is written as a novel across 165 pages. It conveys the spirit of various moments of interaction between Turner and the Ndembu people. It centres on women’s rituals framed by a woman anthropologist entering and leaving the field. The novel is dedicated to Victor for his part in introducing Turner to anthropology. Her publication came out only four years after his tragic heart attack, showing that she was able to pick up the pieces and continue her craft even after what her autobiography reveals her to have been an extremely traumatic reaction to the death of a deeply beloved life-long partner. On the other hand, as I have suggested, his death opened up the space for her to return to the field in 1985 and then to see her own work through to publication in 1987.

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<sup>161</sup> Frank Salamone “Anthropology and Mysticism: An Intellectual and Intimate Portrait of Edie Turner”, *Berose-Encyclopedie Internationale Des Histoires De L’Anthropologie* (Paris: University of Phoenix, 2018), 1.

From the outset it is clear that Turner wants to steer away from the conventional architecture that comes with anthropological monographs. In the preface, she says that her aim was to produce “something different” from what other anthropologists were publishing. She claims that the writing style of anthropologists is typically “dispassionate, for the presentation of information and its analysis is primary”.<sup>162</sup> This was particularly true of the “structuralist school” in British anthropology to which her husband and the Oxford-trained Max Gluckman belonged.<sup>163</sup>

Turner’s professed aim, by contrast, is to “recreate as experience the cultural events Victor Turner and I witnessed among the Ndembu of Zambia”. She elected to write the novel in a form which she felt would best convey the human experience of women’s rituals and of her interactions with these women of Kajima village. She therefore structured her piece as a story, as she felt that it is only in this form that she would be able to convey “something of the original experience”.<sup>164</sup> She describes her narrative as a form of “advocacy for anthropology in the female style”.<sup>165</sup> There Turner makes it explicit that she is writing as a woman anthropologist looking to develop the presence of women in a male-dominant discipline. She writes in a “style” appropriate to one who is writing in the experiences of women subjects who are ignored in field studies. It is also evident that the position from which she wrote was from a place of “feelings” rather than a methodical account of the processes of the rituals. She says that she “wanted to get it [down] before the feelings disappeared”, and that she “did not regard it as an academic account”.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Edith Turner, *The Spirit and the Drum: A Memoir of Africa* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), ix.

<sup>163</sup> For the first extended and still the clearest account of the shift in the British social anthropology tradition from the more literary functionalism of Malinowski to the more sociological, abstract and comparative structuralism of ‘the Oxford school’ of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and his disciples including Max Gluckman see Adam Kuper, *Anthropologists and Anthropology: The British School, 1922-1973* (London: Kegan Paul, 1973).

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, x.

<sup>166</sup> Engelke, “An Interview with Edith Turner”, 849.

The novel extends over nine chapters (apart from the preface and postscript). Each named after a specific object or symbol relating to the theme of the chapter. I will provide a close critical analysis of seven of these nine chapters, with particular attention to writing style and humanistic themes.

### **1. Into the Land of the Ndembu**

The first chapter titled “Into the Land of the Ndembu” documents Turner’s warm reception in Kajima village on her return in late 1953 with Victor and her three children, Freddie, Bob and Rene, for what would be their second year-long period of fieldwork in the village. In this chapter, Turner makes a conscious effort to convince the reader of her acquaintance with Kajima life and the women who she had befriended on her previous visit. The chapter is filled with moments of connection, highlighting her and Victor’s close ties with the Ndembu villagers.<sup>167</sup>

A first person narrative from the first chapter that Turner adopts is essential in understanding her preoccupation with writing a personal account. She advertises it in her subtitle as a “memoir of Africa” an account of her experiences in Kajima Village. She emphasises in her preface that she “always writes herself”<sup>168</sup> into her narratives.

Rather surprisingly for a reader anticipating a romantic tale of an African encounter, she dwells upon the “shabb[iness]” of the village. She describes it as a “dump”, knowing very well what it looked like given that this was her second visit to Kajima. Victor then convinces her, in what can only be read as a staged dialogue given her preceding year of experience that Kajima is the area well suited for studying rituals as they are familiar with the people. They can easily submerge themselves in their studies. In hindsight, she confesses Victor was right. She then proceeds to describe the unpacking of their luggage. Turner is hinting to the reader

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<sup>167</sup> Turner, *The Spirit and the Drum*, 10.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, x.

that the rituals that they studied are rich and a blessing for ethnographers to stumble upon, but more importantly it provides the reader with insight into the mind of the anthropologist going through the familiar and highly mundane rituals associated with entering or, in this case, re-entering a field-site.<sup>169</sup>

The first gathering witnessed by Turner on her second arrival in Kajima is a game played by Ndembu women and children. She is invited to observe and does so with immense admiration.

Spellbound, I listened to the art of the impromptu blending of parts- a lost art in the West except among blacks and specially trained groups [...] A senior woman entered the group and began to teach them while they listened respectfully [...] Fascinated, I watched.<sup>170</sup>

Turner is captivated by the game, yet another example of the “*communitas*” that she would recollect fondly. Her adjectives “fascinated”, “spellbound” seek to convey the intensity of her immersion and absorption into the play of village life. She describes in rich detail how the game was played. She not only wants to convey her actual experience, but finds it relevant to write in her account of how she feels at the time through first person narrative.

By using a narrative structure as opposed to the analytical formal style of conventional monographs, Turner is also able to make comparisons between her own personal experience of life in England and that of her life in Africa. This hints at the audience that Turner wishes to address, for she uses her novel as an opportunity respond to her experience of growing up in England. This much is already evident in Chapter One, where she describes an incident that takes place after her day’s fieldwork when she meets up with Victor who had spent the day with the men of Kajima Village. His words to her are: “Didn’t I tell you? ... What a welcome eh?” By this Victor is evidently referring to Turner’s reservations about returning to Kajima. Turner’s response is: “We’ve been shown some real courtesy. Do you think we

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 8.  
<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 10.

will be able to show our own kids such courtesy?” Victor replies: “Let’s try; we European savages have a lot to learn”.<sup>171</sup> Here Turner is reflecting on the politeness shown to the strangers by the villagers on their arrival. Even though the Turners come from Europe, a continent which prides itself on its “civilised” etiquette, including the practice of courtesy and development of refined character, they believe that the people in Africa (stereotyped by Europeans for incivility and barbarism), in fact are the epitome of civility. They would like their children to model their behaviour on these more deeply humanist values.

This welcome is not simply because the villagers knew her well, it being her second visit to the village. In her autobiography she notes how upon their first arrival in Kajima in 1952, “the villagers gathered and sang a welcome song” for her and her children. She was then presented with a chicken as a welcoming gift. She thinks to herself that she is being taught love by non-Christians.<sup>172</sup> This is an implicit reference to her childhood in England where her experience of religion, as discussed above, was one that conveyed little of this kind of love, humanity and warmth. It is only in a remote village on the border between Northern Rhodesia and Angola, where Europeans claim there is an absence of religion, that she really finds out what love and compassion mean. In her autobiography she vividly compares the welcome in terms of the songs of praise familiar from home.

How could I possibly document the Ndembu’s welcome in social science parlance, underplaying it? It was like the ‘Hallelujah Chorus,’ Beethoven’s ‘Songs of Joy,’ the ‘Marseillaise’, the ending of the song ‘For All the Saints,’ ‘When the Saints come Marching In’ It is the song of “communitas” and it is the essence of this book.<sup>173</sup>

Turner thus compares the welcome that they received in Kajima Village with the rousing music of best known European musician, Beethoven, the national anthem of France, and the Hallelujah Chorus, a Christian hymn. By doing this, she indicates to the audience that she is

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Turner, *Heart of Lightness*, 64.

writing to, namely Europeans and Americans well versed in these genres of music, the depth of emotion expressed in these passionate songs. She also wishes to depict the strong resemblance between Ndembu custom and the themes of love and compassion in the Christian faith, attempting to convey a sense of equality between European and African. It is also a reference to her and Victor's later life conversion to Catholicism in 1960, after her return from Kajima to England.<sup>174</sup> One could also refer to the title of her autobiography, *Heart of Lightness*, a play on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*<sup>175</sup>, that famous modernist novel in which the protagonist's initial perception of Africa is a stigma carried by most Europeans as being a primitive and a symbolically "dark continent". Turner's title turns this stigma on its end by referring to the symbolic light that Africa brings in the form of love, compassion and equality.

Furthermore, the methodology that Turner uses is that of an eye-witness in her effort to convey a rich description of female experiences. Turner immerses herself among the women. By doing this Turner was able to convey how and what she felt during the moments of ritual and interaction, as close to the actual experience as possible.<sup>176</sup> "In the Land of the Ndembu", Turner foregrounds her engagements with the village women. She vividly describes the night when Victor was visiting some men in the village and some of the women came to visit her in her tent. "We've come for a chat as you're all by yourself, Mishy". What follows is a delightful encounter, again rich in dialogue and conveying a vivid sense of the intimacy of the space inside the tent. She uses very short simple sentences to convey a sense of the ease and lightness of the occasion.

"Come in, great to see you. *Ingila Mwani*", I said, no longer bored, and I moved up along the camp cot to leave space. In came Manyosa around the flap, her long face alight with curiosity. We greeted, both giggling a little with pleasure. After her came

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<sup>174</sup> Turner, *Heart of Lightness*, xx.

<sup>175</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, (Claremont: Coyote Canon Press, 2007).

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

Mangaleshi, benevolent and gracious, then Mesala wearing a delighted grin. She was the clown of the village [...] She collapsed on my camp cot, which rocked alarmingly. That was enough. We were all roaring with laughter.<sup>177</sup>

This first-hand encounter may on the surface merely seem to have been a pleasant but insignificant moment on her second fieldtrip to Kajima. However, this incident is purposefully placed in the first chapter to show the reader the spirit of engagement, and the lightness and laughter that Turner shared with her African women friends.

The fact that the women felt free to visit her tent late at night and occupy not only her living space, but also that most intimate of domestic spaces, her bed, shows us just how comfortable the women were with Turner, now a 33-year old white, middle class woman from England. She addresses them by their first names, showing that she is well acquainted with each individual. Furthermore, she and the women “roar with laughter”, conveying the level of inclusivity that she is met with.

Owing to the chronological order that the novel follows, the chapter ends with a tragic experience that left Turner struck with grief. Soon after their arrival in Kajima, she contracted a bout of malaria.<sup>178</sup> She gradually became better, but the illness seemed to have awoken a motherly role in her in nursing the sick. Women and children sought medical assistance from her. She offered them medicine and nourishment in the form of milk and meat to aid their healing.<sup>179</sup> But one Ndembu boy fell terribly ill, which prompted the people of the village to gather around him by an outside fire to chant and pray in a final attempt to save him. Upon examining the boy, Turner noticed that his symptoms resembled those of tetanus or lockjaw. He lay hopelessly on the floor with his jaw locked while she attempted to feed him medicine from her bag. Turner tried to warm the cold boy up by holding him against her sitting close to

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 26 and 27.



the fire.<sup>180</sup> The boy suddenly pulled up stiff, and then all his muscles relaxed in a final movement. She realised that the boy had died, at which she cried with grief at the loss.<sup>181</sup>

Turner then moves the reader away from the moment of the boy's death to the moment when she writes the account of his death and reflects on the tragic incident. She confesses that "the reader will find that I've managed to entangle myself into [the story] without being able to get out. A little of myself died with Mbimbi's son, it was my son sick on my lap, my terror when he was dragged from me inwards into another world".<sup>182</sup> That she grieved along with them shows how emotionally included Turner was with the people in Ndembu. It also depicts her deep empathy and her first-hand experience of mothering her children.

## 2. The Knife

Chapter Two, "The Knife", is skilfully placed after the death of the boy. This chapter is centred around the initiation ceremony from boyhood to manhood, following a ritual of circumcision. The deeper understanding of this ritual is to prepare the boys for sexual maturity which would then lead to procreation.<sup>183</sup> Whereas the end of the previous chapter emphasised the death of a boy of Kajima, this chapter celebrates a process of creating a new stage of life. "The Knife" also symbolically refers to the circumcision process as this is the instrument used to remove the foreskin.

Turner confesses that she could not witness the boys' initiation rituals first-hand and therefore had to rely on Victor's field notes and the reports of male witnesses.<sup>184</sup> The detail with which Turner conveys the experience is impressive, given that it was not an incident that she personally witnessed. It confirms that she was a sensitive and attentive listener.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, x

The circumcision ceremony took place in Nyaluhana, about 14 miles away from Kajima village. Victor and Turner walked there with “Muchona the Hornet”, Victor’s famous research assistant (See Figure 2).<sup>185</sup> Although Turner could not be present for the actual circumcision ceremony, she participated in the roles that the mother’s play. The build-up to the ritual consisted of singing by all those present. The song was written like a riddle, which Turner translated into English and presented in her chapter in the following poetic format:

You dare not meet the lion,  
He’ll devour you on the trail  
Kwalamo! [Circumcision]

The swamp-bound stork lies low,  
Sharp reeds surround her nest  
Kwalamo!

And the high-flying kite has stooped  
To lay her eggs with the stork  
Kwalamo!

The timid lizard turns round,  
Lays eggs in the mamba’s hole  
Kwalamo!

The mother of the child  
Long since has cursed my name  
Kwalamo!

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 34. On Victor Tunner’s famous essay entitled “Muchona the Hornet, Interpreter of Religion” in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967). This essay is famous as a pioneering exploration of the life story and roles of research assistants in African anthropology.]

Mother, keep out and wail,  
Your child is taken from you  
Kwalamo!

In the lodge beyond the world  
The prince and slave are one  
Kwalamo!<sup>186</sup>

One can assume that during this ritual various songs were performed. However, Turner specifically selected this song to form part of this chapter. This is not by chance as this song carefully summarises the ritual process. The lion represents the person who will be carrying out the “Kwalamo” which is the Ndembu word for circumcision. He prowls around the crowd of boys like a lion.<sup>187</sup> The second verse of not being able to turn in bed refers to the healing process when the boys are to lie on their backs so as not disturb the healing. The following three verses are laden with sexual innuendo, relating that the boys will eventually pair up with girls of the village who have reached sexual maturity for procreation. The verses referring to the mothers then emphasise the separation between mother and child, possibly for the first time in their lives, as the child will stay in the secluded “lodge” for the healing period, a place that cannot be visited by anyone.<sup>188</sup>

The rest of the chapter then fleshes out the details of the ritual that we learn about in the song, as told to her by male informants and Victor. The moments of humanism that Turner usually hones in on in her chapters are missing in this one, because Turner could not witness the ritual in person. Therefore there is not much of “her” written into the accounts.

Turner does, however, write Victor into her narrative a presence among the elders who carried out the circumcisions. She says, “He must have spread his own easiness around him,

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 42.

for nobody minded him being white”. This was certainly an auspicious occasion for the Ndembu people and Victor was a part of it. She attributes to him the important responsibility to “give the world of learning a brilliant analysis” of the “Kwalamo”, which she in turn would use to produce her later narrative.<sup>189</sup>

### 3. Threshold

In terms of chronology, there is a clear linear order with Chapter Three succeeding Chapter Two. In the first line of Chapter Three, Turner states, “Those boys were hardy, while they were living naked in the lodge. July had arrived, and the cold was intense.”<sup>190</sup> Turner mentions the boy’s hardiness, bearing the cold because here she takes a step away from narratives of ritual and focuses on the Turners’ need for a structured home in Kajima.<sup>191</sup>

The chapter is titled “Threshold”, after Rilke, a famous German mystic’s “Elegy”. Turner quotes a passage from the poem in opening her chapter, a verse that speaks of love and togetherness within a home or threshold.<sup>192</sup> It is not a coincidence that Turner chooses these lines to reflect her yearning for a stable home filled with love, as love and humanism have been Turner’s motivation for writing about her ethnographic experience in Kajima Village. The home could therefore also symbolise her total immersion among the Ndembu people. In this sense it could symbolise a physical monument of the relationships that she built.

Turner’s enthusiasm for her new home and her relationship with the people of its land come through strongly when she writes with beautiful eloquence that “we were to feel the hand of emotion lightly strike across the chords of our hearts”. She claims that “we knew we were lucky to come to this land, for if we had never left home we would have become bitter and

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 52.

cynical”.<sup>193</sup> Her spiritual and emotional home in remote rural Kajima Village is again contrasted here with the historic home of England and its cocooned world of cynicism at a remove from the kind of human connections and cross-cultural interactions that can “strike across the cord of our hearts”.

White settlers in Northern Rhodesia are a rare presence in her text. They feature only in this chapter in the form of a “rancher” evoking the language of America’s Wild West whether for her American readers, or to convey something of the isolated and undisciplined wildness of an uncouth presence. “The rancher” comes to visit them once they have settled into their new home. He is critical of the “native” practices of the Turners. He warned darkly that such lack of respect for colonial and racial boundaries would only lead “natives” to disrespect white people.<sup>194</sup> There is a striking lack of judgement in Turner’s presentation of this distasteful settler presence: no evidence for self-justification. The Turners simply ignore the criticisms and are content to enjoy the “comradeship” that came with having a place to socialise and nurture their friendships with the Ndembu villagers.<sup>195</sup>

The rancher also warns the Turner’s that it is unsafe for white children to live in huts due to the risk of fires. Indeed, a fire did break out in the Turners’ hut a few weeks after the rancher’s visit, ironically serving as evidence for this white man’s prejudices about the dangers of ‘going native’. It happened when Rene’s birthday was being celebrated. The fire was confined to the kitchen. The chapter ends with Turner happily serving cake to salvage what was left of little Rene’s birthday after the chaos, a light ending to a serious chapter.<sup>196</sup>

#### **4. The Milk Tree**

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 54 and 55.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

In Chapter Four titled “The Milk Tree”,<sup>197</sup> Turner discusses the ritual experience of a female protagonist named Mwenda who has reached sexual maturity. In terms of the structure of her narrative, this chapter flows coherently on from the preceding chapters, in that Turner has introduced the world of women through the story of her intimate welcome in the tent and the world of Ndembu ritual in her account of male initiation. Turner uses skilful narrative techniques in order to recreate her experience of the Ndembu girls’ initiation ritual to convey the rich details of the “Milk Tree” ceremony to her readers. In the preface of the book she confessed to having amalgamated various different girls’ initiation ceremonies into one coherent narrative to make for a better story.<sup>198</sup> Turner was upfront about her quest to present an experiential and accessible narrative of events, despite a degree of re-invention involved in this writing process.

According to Turner, among the collective of women at the procession, three women were related to the initiate through the matrilineal line: Mwenda’s aunt (acting as a midwife), Mwenda’s sister and Mwenda’s cousin. These three wrapped Mwenda in a thick blanket and took her to the forest at dawn. They placed her next to the Milk Tree, a thick shrub producing rubber sap. The Milk Tree is symbolic for fertility and growth. The Milk Tree represents the maternal process of pregnancy, and then of producing children, just as trees sprout and produce branches and leaves. It can also be symbolic for the milk produced in the ripe breasts of a woman when motherhood arrives. The blanket that Mwenda is wrapped in, symbolises both death and rebirth. It functions as a death shroud and also as a cosy womb, befitting of the process of dying as a girl and being reborn as a woman.

Turner describes here, with the benefit of first-hand experience, how the women sang and danced around a sleeping Mwenda, chanting verses of songs as women from neighbouring

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, ix.

villages joined in beautiful new dresses. She draws our attention to an old woman entering the circle dressed in a new green and gold dress with bangles. She does this to show the extravagance and hereby associated with this ritual.

A bridegroom was present and had a special part to play in the ceremony. He was made to sit at the top of a hut specially built for the occasion. He sat on the roof like a “rooster” with his legs opened, suggesting a sexual position, but also presenting him as a figure of fun in this women’s world. Apart from the singing and dancing, a meal of cassava and beans, a necessary part of the practice, was prepared for everyone who participated or witnessed the ritual. Turner herself tasted the food, an experience she seemingly regretted. “Manyosa drew me towards the dish. It was a dish for women. It was somewhat like eating wallpaper paste or the edge of a wet slice of bread ‘I’ve had enough,’ I told her. ‘Thank you’”. Tastes, like sights and sounds, referenced by the symbolic drums of her title, are significant sensory forms of her engagements with an unusual new cultural world.

The fact that Turner could document the ritual in such meticulous detail and participated in the eating of the cassava shows how she was able to immerse herself among the women that she had formed friendships. She was invited to be a participant and not simply an observer in the terms of the discourse of her discipline. Reading this chapter, one gets no sense that her account of the ritual is taken from a number of different ceremonies. She skilfully weaves a narrative with engaged and intimate attention to her female subjects. The reader is allowed to witness Mwenda’s experience of initiation, seemingly and seamlessly from beginning to end.

Mwenda remained in the initiation hut for three months after her ceremony with a caregiver. At the end of this period, the women gathered to adorn her in finery and make her ready for womanhood. Her blanket was discarded and the women anointed her with rich oils and mud. Turner enjoyed the togetherness that she felt with these women and records her friend



Manyosa saying “she’s one of us”. Turner warmly records that “a strong camaraderie developed”.<sup>199</sup> These feelings of “communitas” remained with Turner providing her, one might imagine, with the inspiration and motivation to return to her manuscript so many decades after being in the field. Her novel is a tribute to the feelings of love and togetherness she shared with these women during the ceremony, one of several heightened moments of connection like the informal welcome party in her tent.

## 6. The Fish Eagle

Chapter Six again is structured to succeed chronologically the previous incidences and is centred on Manyosa who has developed a serious illness with a growth that formed on her neck. It follows Chapter Five, “The Bottom of The Year”, which is one of the shortest chapters of the novel, covering just over five pages. Here Turner discusses a Sunday picnic trip with Turner and her family, and a small excursion that Turner and Manyosa went on near a river in Kajima.<sup>200</sup>

Throughout the novel Turner makes mention of her relationship with Manyosa, so no doubt it was out of great concern to her when she fell ill. Turner suggested that Manyosa seek help from a western medical professional. Instead a “shaking” ritual was scheduled, to rid Manyosa of a white spirit that was causing her ailments.<sup>201</sup> Turner confesses to never having witnessed a spirit possession rite before and now with her close friend, she has the opportunity to attend such a ceremony. The rite took place in front of a fire with a man named Nsimba as the spirit medium. The participants danced and drummed and discussed who the troubled soul might be that had possessed Manyosa.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 82- 87.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 90.

Manyosa's dancing grew more violent. She was shaking and spinning so that the spirit could be drawn out. Turner was unable to recognise the Manyosa that she grew close to in the now frenzied gyrating woman. She felt anguish about the fact that Manyosa did not look herself and wished that she were able to pull her friend out of the trance that she seemed to entrap her. Turner shared the pain and suffering that her friend was experiencing and perhaps felt helpless. The only cure that Turner was familiar with was Western medicine, which she reiterated to Manyosa throughout the chapter as an attempt to provide a solution. It is during this ritual that we learn that the chapter title refers to the movement of Manyosa's body while she danced, which is described as a Fish Eagle.<sup>203</sup> It might as easily have been titled "The Fish Eagle".

Manyosa underwent a second shaking ritual, one more intense than the first one, also led by Nsimba. She shook to the drums and swayed her body once more before she was overcome by shivers. The ritual lasted all night and the people stayed in an attempt to cure the inhabitant of their village. The ritual helped in healing Manyosa's spirit for the next day she seemed to have a positive energy about her. Turner suggested to her that it was time that she cured her physical self by having the lump removed from her throat, and helped in arranging an operation for Manyosa in the Copper belt hospital.<sup>204</sup>

After admission to the hospital was made difficult by an African clerk, following colonial bureaucracy, Manyosa underwent the operation.<sup>205</sup> She arrived back at the village from the Copper belt weak with a neck wound from where the growth used to be. When she returned the women had organised a welcome back party for her.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 105.

Later that night, after Turner retired to bed, Manyosa's husband came to wake her, asking her to assist Manyosa who was experiencing immense pain due to post-operative complications. Turner worried for her friend, rushed to tend to her wound and then moved her to her own tent so that she could look after her during the night.<sup>207</sup> Manyosa survived and Turner ends the chapter with a shift away from the narrative of illness to celebrating Manyosa as a person and as her friend. Here we see the humanistic quality of Turner:

[She was] [m]y mother, sister, and daughter, and she was my grandmother to little Rene. Her pinched-up eyes and goggling gaze, full of pity and emotion, remained in my mind for years to come. So often I had looked into her eyes and squeezed the thumb of her hand, feeling the worldly gaiety of this friend of mine as we shared the same stool ... Manyosa had been the one who rooted me. Manyosa, whom I was going to lose.

These words are heavy with the love and friendship that Turner and Manyosa shared. Turner felt it necessary to immortalise Manyosa in her narrative. The loss that she speaks about is when she returns back home, an inevitable journey that was to come soon.



## 8. Drums of Thunder

Chapter Seven, "The Sorcerer's Rage" is a short preliminary chapter that provides a backstory for Chapter Eight. It covers an incident of a well-known man, Samutamba who was ostracised from the village for a year for performing sorcery on his step-mother, Nyamwaha (Manyosa's biological mother), and for picking fights in drunken rages.<sup>208</sup>

"Drums of Thunder" covers the incident where Samutamba's mother-in-law and his wife, Engeniya require spiritual rituals to cure them of the sorcery done to them by Samutamba. Nyamuvwila is described as bearing a terrible illness known to be leprosy in the village. Turner uses the "complaints" that Nyamuvwila reported over a period of time to narrate the progression of her illness.<sup>209</sup> She then documents the incident in a concise story form, relating

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 111-113.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, xi.

the time that Nyamuvwila visited the controversial diviner and the subsequent ceremony that led to her cure. In this north-western province of Northern Rhodesia colonial authorities had outlawed the act of divining. So in order to attend a divination, the Turners travelled some 100 kilometres from Mwinilungu to the border between Northern Rhodesia and Angola.<sup>210</sup>

Turner recounts watching Nyamuvwila's consultation with the diviner and supplements her account with information received from the rest of the group who were present at this event. The diviner shakes objects in a basket, such as a coin, some calabashes and three strings, among other things. He then analyses the objects in the basket in relation to the position in which they land.<sup>211</sup>

Nyamuvwila is advised to hold a ritual called "Chihamba" to summon the "Grandfather", the ancestors that will rid Nyamuvwila of her illness and her daughter's barrenness.<sup>212</sup> The ritual is carefully documented by Turner as she attempts to capture every beat of the drum and the deep voice of the spirit.<sup>213</sup>

The formulation of the narrative through her account and that of the informants makes for a full and powerful narrative. Her participation makes this possible. Again able to supply the most intricate of details of this ritual. Manyosa, her dear Ndembu friend, includes her in the gathering and teaches her "the special handshake for Chihamba".<sup>214</sup> Here we see how she relied on the presence of her friend to deepen her understanding Ndembu culture. Each participant is then given a rattle to shake according to a rhythm. Turner was given one and taught the rhythm by the girls.<sup>215</sup> Her active participation in the ritual and being taught by the informants, her friends whom she holds dearly, allowed her to convey an in-depth sense

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 129.

conceptualise her narrative and of the intricacies of the ritual. It is also evident in this chapter that Turner is not as affected by the illness of Nyamuvwila, which reflects on the intimacy of the relationship between Mayosa and Turner.

### **9. Return**

Chapter Nine documents Turner's departure from Kajima Village back to England across six sorrowful pages. She begins, "our fieldwork was finished". These unequivocal opening words provide a hint to us of the inevitability of a journey back home. It is clear that the chapter will be filled with Turner's sorrow at leaving Africa. She cried when she left and as a sympathetic writer who sets the sombre mood, she describes the weather as "awful: grey with torrential rains dinning off the roof of the cab".<sup>216</sup>

She ends the chapter by revealing how deeply unsettled she was as she longed for Africa until she went back to Kajima a year later, but this time in a dream. The fact that she dreamt about it shows just how deeply she longed to go back. When she saw Kajima village and the Ndembu people in her dream, her "heart expanded with happiness, [she] was actually back. [she] was actually back". The double use of the sentence is to reiterate the love she has for Kajima, and could not be separated from her ethnographic work for this "she" is imbedded in all the rituals, meetings and studies.

### **Conclusion**

Edith Turner stumbled into anthropology through her husband's association with the discipline. With no prior university degree nor formal training, she plunged into fieldwork in Kajima as her husband's research assistant during two field expeditions in 1952-3 and then 1953-4.

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 150.

Turner's skilfully written memoir-cum-novel documenting the lives and rituals of Ndembu women, however, explicitly steers away from the conventional ethnographic monographs of the type authored by husband Victor, often with her under-acknowledged support. *The Spirit and the Drum* was published in 1987, and I have sought to locate the book within anthropology's literary turn but also within her energised re-engagement with the field in the wake of her husband's death in 1983.

I have sought to analyse the structure of the novel in relation to its parallel narratives of the life of a woman anthropologist and her family in the field, on the one hand, and the intimate engagements of this woman anthropologist with her female ethnographic subjects paying particular attention to ritual. The literary techniques which Turner uses to describe the girl's initiation ceremony, "The Milk Tree", the boy's circumcision, "The Knife" and the ritual, "Drums of Thunder", enable her to convey the humanistic emotions that scholarly monographs omit. These human encounters are conveyed in serial incidents across her second field-trip where she evokes laughter, pain, empathy, joy and eventually a sadness at departure offset to a degree by her unconscious recollection in her later dreams of the human world of a remote village in Africa that she had come to love. In a sense her book with its names friends and richly detailed account of their humanity is a tribute to friendship and cross-cultural connection, but one developed in a courageously experimental and even episodic structure of presentation. As readers we are left less with a sense of satisfying closure than with a sense of vivid experiential encounters across an unusual cultural divide.

## Conclusion: Anthropology and Literature

During the 1970s and 1980s scholars debated the role that writing played in social and cultural anthropology. In 1973 American cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz argued that all ethnographic works can be described as works of fiction as anthropologists cannot fully convey the full details as experienced in the field.<sup>217</sup> Similarly, in 1986 George Marcus and James Clifford explored the complexities of objectivity and reflexivity in the form of narrative within the discipline in their famous text *Writing Culture*.<sup>218</sup> Popular as the text was, it received major criticisms in the form of a gendered debate centred on its claim that women have not contributed to the experimentation of fiction within the discipline.<sup>219</sup>

In response to Clifford and Marcus' claim, Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon edited a collection entitled *Women Writing Culture* published in 1995. The book celebrates the contributions of the many women anthropologists who experimented with ethnographic fiction. It also showcased the extent to which women anthropologists had greatly assisted in the fieldwork and writing of their over-acknowledged husbands. This was true in the case of Margery Wolf, Elizabeth Fern and Edith Turner.<sup>220</sup>

But as this thesis had shown women anthropologist anticipated this "literary turn" in social and cultural anthropology by several decades. Indeed, one of the reasons why devoted students of Hilda Kuper, like Sondra Hale, were unable to bring out a festschrift on her retirement from UCLA Anthropology Department in 1977 was because the tradition of critical analysis of the kind of ethnographic fiction that she had produced from the 1940s and 1950s onwards was too underdeveloped. In the introduction this thesis thus made a case for

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<sup>217</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973).

<sup>218</sup> James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths", in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* edited by James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 6.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>220</sup> Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley, University of California Press: 1995).



turning Clifford and Marcus' prejudicial claim on its head, arguing that women writers in fact led the experimental creative turn. Drawing on particular biographical studies, but also the insightful short overview of twentieth century ethnographic fiction by Nancy Schmidt, published in 1984 in the newly established *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly*, I questioned whether such creative writings by women anthropologists might be regarded as more than "a hidden literary style" as Schmidt proposed but rather be conceptualised as "a hidden literary tradition".

What would a fuller account of such a hidden literary tradition look like in relation to African and African American anthropology? Such an excavation would surely begin by showcasing the remarkable studies of African American folklore produced by Zora Neale Hurston in her precociously race-sensitive studies of the 1930s. It would continue by locating Hilda Beemer Kuper as a highly significant figure in the crafting of this new tradition from the 1940s through to the 1960s. As I have indicated Hilda Kuper wrote a series of poems and short stories in the 1940s in her first phase of experimental writing which were followed by a gripping indictment of Swazi patriarchy and the painful dilemma faced by co-wives and barren women in this highly patriarchal culture. She analysed the complex practices and beliefs associated with witchcraft in her famous play *A Witch in My Heart: A Play Set in Swaziland* (written in 1954 and published in siSwati in 1962 and in English in 1970) and in her novel *A Bite of Hunger* (written in 1958 and published in 1965).

Through a detailed analysis of these two texts I sought to encourage a deeper appreciation of the rather remarkable literary craft of Kuper in ways that go beyond the established literature whether post-colonial or career overviews with attention to relationship between her fieldwork and her fiction. Here we saw her imaginative and immersed ability to foreground the experience of Swazi women protagonists and capture their cultural contradictions as subjects dominated by man and tradition, but also as subjects (in the case of Lamtana) driven

by “a bite of hunger” for modernity. I sought to emphasise how Kuper used her long years of experience of fieldwork and the formal writing of ethnographic monographs as resources for her equally, arguably even greater achievements as an author even if they have received nothing like the scholarly critical acclaim that she attracted with *An African Aristocracy* (1947). These texts have, however, had a considerable educational afterlife which I have not analysed in any detail. Her play was taught in Swazi schools and at the University of Swaziland from 1962 when it was first published in siSwati and attracted students at the University of Manchester after it was published in an English International African Institute edition in 1970 at the prompting of her friend and colleague Max Gluckman.

The recreation of this ethnographic tradition would also take account of the work of Laura Bohannan who, along with her husband Jim, conducted fieldwork among the Tiv people of West Africa and published in 1954 what is still probably the single best known anthropologist’s work of ethnographic fiction: *Return to Laughter*. Born in America, the Bohannans were, significantly, located in the British tradition of social anthropology as they did their doctoral degrees in anthropology at Oxford University in the early 1950s.

The story of women writing culture from within British social anthropology could contribute by examining Edith Turner also experimented with her the novel, *The Spirit and the Drum* (1987). What makes the two anthropologists distinctive in their techniques is that both are women anthropologists documenting the experiences of women subjects in the field. Both Kuper and Turner focus strongly on women protagonists in their creative pieces. In the case of Kuper, she successfully crafts two strong women characters Bigwapi in the play and Lamtana in the novel to represent all women in the villages who experience witchcraft accusations and the implications thereof by their own family members. Here one gets the sense that Kuper felt a responsibility to convey the plights of women in Swazi society through humanistic themes.

Kuper's humanistic elements of love, jealousy and grief bear elements of a Shakespearean love tragedy with Bigwapi being banished and losing her husband, Sikova who she shares an intensely romantic bond with. The play ends with the family fragmented, irreparable relationships and the death of an innocent baby, leaving readers to sympathise with the characters till the very end.

This is in contrast to the last chapter of *A Bite of Hunger* where the novel concludes on a positive note. In the end Lamtana, the main character is hopeful about escaping Swazi traditions to move to the city. This ending marks the strength of the female character, willing to leave the patriarchal setting where she will be looked after by her husband, to become an independent working woman. In this sense Kuper is highly successful at providing two well-rounded and rich characters, with multiple layers of complexity.

The story of women writing culture from within British social and American cultural anthropology would continue by examining the popular science fiction of Ursula le Guin, author of *The Dispossessed* (1974) and other novels that feature anthropologist-styled protagonist in futuristic form. Le Guin has attracted a wider critical readership and scholars have drawn attention to her reliance on her anthropological background as the daughter of Alfred and Theodora Kroeber, the former typically featured in compilations of "Founding Fathers".

Chapter Two sought to demonstrate that Edith Turner's *The Spirit and the Drum*, published in 1987, is a significant feminist, post-modern and experimental humanist work of ethnographic fiction. Although based on her experiences of joint fieldwork with her more famous husband Victor across two expeditions to remote Kajima Village in the north-western part of Northern Rhodesia in 1952-3 and then in 1953-4, first drafted under the title "Kajima" in 1956-7, her project was re-energised in the wake her husband's traumatic sudden death

prompting her to return to the field in 1985 and then to rewrite her manuscript for publication by the University of Arizona Press in 1987. Her literary style to use Schmidt's term is strikingly different from that of Kuper. Where Kuper used drama, plot and character, in both the play and novel, Turner's ethnographic fiction is even more experimental given its episodic, discontinuous structure. Her novel-cum-memoir writes the woman anthropologist into the narrative in ways that Kuper does not, outside of her short stories at least. It is centred on incidents of connection and a language of emotion: the human bonds and connections that she forged with named friends in Kajima Village. Like Kuper then, she is concerned to explore the worlds of experience and emotion, the terrain of affect, in ways that explicitly sought to counter the structural social anthropology of her male contemporaries, including that of her husband! In a certain respect she was arguably both more marginal and more edgy in her effort to challenge the canon and an academic world which she found discomfiting and even sterile. (She blamed dry demanding academia for her husband's heart attack).

The choice of more contemporary experimental women writers is extremely wide. Behar and Gordon identify African American novelist Alice Walker as a potential ancestor in the tradition. In the South African context Lauren Beukes, Kharnita Mohammad and others have experimented with fictive writing which takes culture and ethnography, in Mohammad's case the Western Cape Muslim family and community as its central theme.

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