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978-1-107-02938-5 - Inside African Anthropology: Monica Wilson and Her Interpreters

Edited by Andrew Bank and Leslie J. Bank

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Inside African Anthropology

Inside African Anthropology offers an incisive biography of the life and work of South Africa's foremost social anthropologist, Monica Hunter Wilson. By exploring her main fieldwork and intellectual projects in southern Africa between the 1920s and 1960s through a massive personal archive, the book offers insights into the personal and intellectual life of a leading African anthropologist. Beginning with her origins in the remote Eastern Cape, the authors follow Wilson to Cambridge University and back into the field among the Pondo of South Africa, where her studies resulted in her 1936 book *Reaction to Conquest*. Her fieldwork focus then shifted to Tanzania, where she teamed up with her husband, Godfrey Wilson. She later returned to South Africa to begin her teaching career at Fort Hare University and record her Tanzanian research. In the 1960s, Wilson embarked on a new urban ethnography with a young South African anthropologist, Archie Mafeje, one of the many black scholars she trained. This study also provides a meticulously researched exploration of the indispensable contributions of African research assistants and co-researchers to the production of this famous woman scholar's cultural knowledge about mid-twentieth-century Africa.

Andrew Bank is Associate Professor and head of the History Department at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. He has been commissioning editor of the journal *Kronos: Southern African Histories* since 2001 and is a member of the editorial board for the *South African Historical Journal*.

Leslie J. Bank is Professor of Social Anthropology and Director of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of Fort Hare, South Africa. He is the author of *Home Spaces, Street Styles: Contesting Power and Identity in a South African City* (2011). He is a member of the editorial board of the International Africa Institute's journal, *Africa*.

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‘In this provocative engagement with the legacy of Monica Wilson, one of anthropology’s most innovative pioneers, the contributors make a strong case for the enduring relevance of her scholarly vision – her insistence on the discipline’s relation to history, its unique understanding of ritual and symbolism, its potential for intimate collaborations across the lines of race, culture, status. In reflecting on why it is that subsequent generations have not fully appreciated Wilson’s genius, whether in Africa or beyond, the authors provide sharp insight into what her story tells us about how anthropology evaluates its own past, about how it often fails to recognise the many “unofficial” contributors – be they anthropologists or their various “assistants” – who have enriched its intellectual bounty.’

– Jean Comaroff, Harvard University

‘This book is highly informative on Monica Hunter Wilson, one of the most significant figures in African anthropology, who at great personal and intellectual costs opted to work from within as apartheid unfolded in South Africa and as some of her contemporaries relocated to universities in the UK and the United States. The book makes a compelling case for Monica Wilson’s achievements and stature as a distinguished and highly regarded ethnographer of social change in Africa; one who recognised and invested significantly in ethnography as co-production and co-implication through the close creative relationships she forged and maintained with her *fellow* African assistants in the course of her career as researcher and teacher. It is a major and welcome contribution to African anthropology increasingly in need of new approaches to its intellectual history, ones that show sensitivity towards processes of inter-dependence, intersubjectivity and reflexivity in knowledge production.’

– Francis B. Nyamnjoh, University of Cape Town

‘This book is among the best written volumes I have read. It uncovers an “unofficial” history of anthropology from South Africa. Each of the authors shows how anthropology emerges not just as an expression of theory or the genealogy of its leading figures, but through the unfolding of diverse lives. The most important relationships are between Monica and Godfrey Wilson and the black South Africans, Zambians, and Tanganyikans who engaged with them as informants, interpreters and clerks, but also as culture brokers, patrons and intellectuals. Monica’s liberalism and the context of segregation were always powerful influences, but as a study of lived relationships, *Inside African Anthropology* reveals the heterogeneity and negotiation in intellectual work.’

– Nancy Jacobs, Brown University

‘Combining critical intellectual history with biography, the chapters that make up this fascinating book remind us again that social anthropological scholarship has always been a “co-production”, no more so than in South Africa during the period of apartheid. Unusually, among her peers, Monica Wilson always acknowledged this fact – it was intrinsic to her life’s work as a scholar and dedicated teacher.’

– Megan Vaughan, Cambridge University

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and



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Vuyiswa Swana is the younger sister of the late Archie Mafeje. She worked as a nurse at Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg until the late 1960s before serving as a health worker on the Johannesburg City Council. She and her husband Marshall have three sons and now live in retirement in Mthatha, Eastern Cape. She maintained close contact with her brother from shared childhood years in rural Thembuland through his years in exile and after he had returned to southern Africa in the early 1990s.

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The transfer of the Wilson Collection to UCT Libraries coincided with the appointment of Lesley Hart as head of the Manuscripts and Archives Department. Her deep and ongoing sense of commitment to the Collection has been evident from the time that she journeyed to the Hogsback in 2000 to collect a large body of documents to add to the substantial collection that had been transferred to UCT a few years earlier. She then began the long process of sorting these additional papers which Monica had archived in sundry cupboards, bookcases, shelving cabinets and trunks in the stone building that served as her library. Lesley delivered these papers by hand to the shelves of the metal sliding cabinets in the Manuscripts and Archives Department on the ground floor of UCT's Oppenheimer Institute Building. She had already spent more than a year of intensive work compiling the 26-page index to the Collection which all of the authors in this volume have used as their point of access to the documents. More than fifteen years later she is still involved in indexing uncatalogued documents and has overseen the process of digitising the hundreds of negatives of fieldwork photographs contained in the Wilson Collection. We owe her a debt of gratitude for these years of labour.

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In the latter stages of the project, we have benefited from readers' comments and editorial interventions on successive versions of our draft manuscript. Deborah James made detailed and incisive comments and offered enthusiastic support. Two anonymous in-house reviewers, Nancy, Jacobs and Lyn Schumaker, provided constructive and creative engagement with the draft manuscript. Stephanie Kitchen of the International African Institute shepherded the manuscript through to publication with a combination of creative energy and common sense. She has also kindly made extensive last-minute edits to the book's Bibliography.

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Andrew Bank and Leslie J. Bank
January 2013