



Pioneers of the Field
South Africa's Women Anthropologists

Bank, Andrew

Wits University Press

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Focusing on the crucial contributions of women researchers, Andrew Bank demonstrates that the modern school of social anthropology in South Africa was uniquely female-dominated. The book traces the personal and intellectual histories of six remarkable women through the use of a rich cocktail of new archival sources, including family photographs, private and professional correspondence, field-notes and field diaries, published and other public writings and even love letters. The book also sheds new light on the close connections between their personal lives, their academic work and their anti-segregationist and anti-apartheid politics. It will be welcomed by anthropologists, historians and students in African studies interested in the development of social anthropology in twentieth-century Africa, as well as by students and researchers in the field of gender studies.

- Provides the most richly textured biographical account of African anthropology to date
- Proposes an alternative, women-centered narrative of the history of the field
- Richly illustrated, including personal photographs of the anthropologists

Reviews & endorsements

Andrew Bank has made a major contribution to intellectual history in a volume that recognises the role played by six women anthropologists who were major contributors to the creation of a distinctive South African voice in anthropology: Winifred Hoernle, Audrey Richards, Monica Hunter Wilson, Hilda Beemer Kuper, Ellen Hellman, and Eileen Jansen Krige. All, with the exception of Audrey Richards, were South African by birth. They were headed by Winifred Hoernle, founder of the anthropology department at the University of Witwatersrand. She was an inspiring teacher and mentor who encouraged her students to read widely, think deeply, and do superb ethnographic studies that focused on the contemporary world of Southern Africa with its reserves, farms, small towns, and mining centres. Somehow these women have largely been forgotten by successors who owed them much but did not know it. This work celebrates their enduring contribution to the study of African life and the development of the anthropological discipline.

Elizabeth Colson, University of California, Berkeley

Original, meticulously researched and eminently readable, Andrew Bank's landmark study in the history of South African anthropology in its formative phase is a major corrective to the male-dominated view in which the achievements of women anthropologists were greatly undervalued. Aside from its main thesis, the compelling human interest of this book lies in the finely drawn and richly documented biographical portraits of six talented women, 'foremothers' of the Wits anthropology department. Four of these remarkable women were star pupils of Bronislaw Malinowski, whose innovative fieldwork methods they deployed to great effect in their ethnographic accounts. Andrew Bank has succeeded brilliantly in bringing their lives and works together in an engagingly written narrative celebrating their humanist legacy.

Michael Young, Australian National University

Andrew Bank's insightful scholarship provides a much-needed revision not only to the history of South African anthropology, but to the history of socio-cultural anthropology in general. His vivid portraits of six outstanding South African women social anthropologists beginning with the dynamic Winifred Hoernle and continuing with her exceptional female students – lead us to amend the heretofore androcentric history of social anthropology in South Africa. But perhaps even more significantly, Bank presents a compelling argument that causes us to appreciate the important role these women – and by association, social anthropology – played in the anti-apartheid movement and the transformation of race relations in 20th century South Africa.

Nancy Lutkehaus, University of Southern California

This penetrating study of pioneering women academics in South Africa and beyond explores the tensions between personal, scholarly and political engagements. A major contribution to African studies, it will also enrich – and complicate – current debates about the public role of anthropology.

Adam Kuper, Centennial Professor, London School of Economics