



ISAAC SCHAPER, IN THE FIELD AMONG THE TSWANA, MOCHUDI, IN 1929

*Royal Anthropological Institute*

# Isaac Schapera

## 1905–2003

THE FOUNDING FATHERS of ‘British social anthropology’ were Bronislaw Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. As an undergraduate at the University of Cape Town, Isaac Schapera was introduced to the new discipline by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. He then became one of the first members of Bronislaw Malinowski’s post-graduate seminar at the London School of Economics. At the age of thirty, he succeeded to Radcliffe-Brown’s position in Cape Town. Twenty years later, he found himself sitting, literally, in Malinowski’s own chair, in his office at the LSE. Yet he was not greatly impressed by the theories of these masters. When his contemporaries divided between the two parties of followers of Malinowski and followers of Radcliffe-Brown, he remained apart, occasionally sniping at both sides, at least in private. He recalled that Malinowski had dubbed him (presumably not altogether favourably) an eclectic (‘whatever that may be’), but his basic belief was that ethnography endured, while theories came and went. Towards the end of his career he preferred to describe himself as an ethnographer rather than as an anthropologist. Yet he was not an ethnographer of the new type, pioneered by Malinowski in the Trobriand Islands. Nor did he agree that functionalist ethnographers necessarily did better research than the Junods or even the Livingstones. In his work, as in his life, he was a loner.

And although he spent the second half of his long life in London, Schapera also remained very much a South African, if a rather particular type of South African—much more so than his friends Meyer Fortes and Max Gluckman, who came to identify with England. Not that he insisted

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too much on matters of identity, except when it came to sports events. (Anyone but England . . .) He let people label him as they wished. Raymond Firth always called him Isaac. To his English friends, he was 'Schap'. But to his intimates, his family and his South African cronies, he was 'Sakkie', which is the Afrikaans diminutive of Isaac.

His parents, Herman and Rosie Schapera,<sup>1</sup> immigrated to South Africa at the turn of the century from what is now Belarus, and settled in Garies, a small town in the semi-desert district of Little Namaqualand, in the Northern Cape. They came with their first two children: Max, who became a country storekeeper, and Annie. Another three children, all sons, were born in South Africa. Isaac, born in Garies on 23 June 1905, was the youngest.

Poor Jewish immigrants to South Africa from Eastern Europe at the turn of the century often made a start as peddlers in rural, Afrikaans-speaking districts. Herman worked as an itinerant peddler and for a while he kept a drapery store in Garies. The Schaperas would have had little to do with the disenfranchised 'non-whites'. In Namaqualand these were so-called Coloured people, some of whom were still identified as Hottentots. Yet even a modest white family had servants. Isaac had a Hottentot nanny. Herman moved his family to Cape Town in 1911, but the family went back to the *dorp* for their holidays, lodging with Annie, whose husband, Nathan Abrahamson, had a hotel in the town. During these holidays Isaac was befriended by a district surgeon, Laidler, who had an interest in local history and traditions, and who let the boy loose in his library.

In Cape Town, Herman tried various ways of making a living, without success. Rosie died in 1918, shortly after Isaac celebrated his bar mitzvah. He observed nine months of mourning and then told his father that the rituals did him no good and that he would not attend the synagogue any longer. His father said he was also not a believer, but had felt that his children should be given something of a religious background, including instruction in Hebrew. Isaac always spoke well of his father, but Herman remarried a year after Rosie's death, to a widow with seven children of her own, and Isaac's relationship with his step-mother was disastrous. At the age of fifteen he left home and went to live alone in a boarding house. He stayed on when he entered the University of Cape Town in 1921, at the age of sixteen, and for the rest of his life he lived in furnished rooms in boarding houses and hotels.

<sup>1</sup> The spelling of the surname was evidently peculiar to the South African branch of the family.

Despite this unhappiness at home, Isaac and his brother Louis were doing well at the South African College School, which claimed to be the oldest secondary school in South Africa and was certainly the leading grammar school in Cape Town. Isaac was a year ahead of another son of poor immigrants, Meyer Fortes, who also became a well-known anthropologist. He told me that Fortes came first in his class at school, while he himself was always runner-up to 'a boy named Solly Zuckerman'.

In 1924 Herman went bankrupt, and in 1925 he committed suicide. Schapera's only sister, Annie, now became the central figure in the family. Her husband had helped to support Louis and Isaac at the University of Cape Town. Louis qualified as a doctor and then emigrated to England. When Isaac arrived in London as a post-graduate student, he and Louis were estranged from each other—Isaac was inclined to blame the break on Louis's new wife—but he always felt close to his sister Annie and in time to her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, in particular his great-niece Carol, who came to live in London.

At the University of Cape Town, Schapera started a degree in law. ('Jewish family tradition. My older brother became a doctor, second brother goes into law . . .')<sup>2</sup> There was provision for the student to take an outside subject in the second year of study. Having been introduced to archaeology and ethnology in Laidler's library, he elected to follow a course in social anthropology, and found himself fascinated by the lectures of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, who had been appointed to the newly established Cape Town chair in social anthropology just as Schapera entered the university.

Cape Town had not only acquired a new professor: it was pioneering a new discipline. This was the first established chair in social anthropology anywhere in the British Empire.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the science, as he called it, that Radcliffe-Brown introduced in Cape Town was very different from the established South African ethnology of the missionary anthropologists like Junod and Bryant, who were strongly influenced by Frazer. It was also a new development in the tradition of British anthropology. Although Radcliffe-Brown was selected for the Cape Town chair by an advisory committee of the anthropological establishment, Haddon, Marett, Frazer and Rivers, he repudiated their conception of anthropology.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Kuper, 'Isaac Schapera—a conversation', Part 1, *Anthropology Today*, 17 (6) (2001), 3–7. Citation p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> See I. Schapera, 'The Appointment of Radcliffe-Brown to the Chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Cape Town', *African Studies*, 49 (1) (1990), 1–13.

In his inaugural lecture, Radcliffe-Brown announced that social anthropology was the comparative study of social structures. Social structures were integrated systems. Any change in any part would have repercussions for the rest of the system. He then drew the moral for South Africa. The traditional social systems of the African peoples had been transformed by European interventions: 'we inaugurated something that must change the whole of their social life'. In consequence, 'segregation is impossible'. This did not imply that South Africa could be governed as a moral unity: the different communities based their laws on different principles, the Europeans, for example, relying on contract, while African people referred rather to ideas of debt.<sup>4</sup> But although he favoured gradual change—it was, he said, 'a law of sociology' that slow change was best—Radcliffe-Brown prophesied that in South Africa 'a new product of civilisation' would combine black and white elements. In his farewell lecture, in 1926, which was fully reported in the *Cape Times*, he concluded that 'South African nationalism must be a nationalism composed of both black and white'.<sup>5</sup>

The African academic and politician, D. D. T. Jabavu, praised Radcliffe-Brown in the *Cape Times* for his 'unbiased racial outlook',<sup>6</sup> but he made the establishment nervous, especially when he challenged the policy makers. Giving evidence to the Economic and Wage Commission of the Union Government in 1925, Radcliffe-Brown testified that:

The process of the assimilation of the natives, i.e. their absorption into the European system, not only economically but also politically, in religion, by education, has been now proceeding for some time and has gathered considerable momentum, and that this process is only to a comparatively slight extent capable of control by legislation.<sup>7</sup>

He insisted that Africans had the same educational potential as whites. When a member of the Commission asked him whether an urban black man was entitled to equal rights with a white man, he replied: 'I cannot see any possible argument to prevent it once he has been brought into our economic system.'

<sup>4</sup> *Cape Times*, 25 Aug. 1921, reprinted as an Appendix (pp. 35–9) in Robert Gordon, 'Early Social Anthropology in South Africa', *African Studies*, 49 (1990), 15–48.

<sup>5</sup> Cited by George W. Stocking, Jr, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology 1888–1951* (Madison, WI, 1995), p. 327.

<sup>6</sup> D. D. T. Jabavu, 'Science and the Native', *Cape Times*, 24 Mar. 1924, cited in Gordon 'Early Social Anthropology in South Africa', 20–1.

<sup>7</sup> Radcliffe-Brown's evidence to the Economic and Wage Commission, Cape Town, 29 Oct. 1925, File no. 44, pp. 4855–924.

Schapera described Radcliffe-Brown as ‘an extremely good lecturer’.

He never lectured from notes, but was so lucid that you just copied everything down . . . With graduates, though, he did not know what to talk about. He had said it already. So he made me do archaeology and courses in the psychology of language and physical anthropology. Also, he was thoroughly detached. The only time he became human was when my father committed suicide. It was in the newspaper. Radcliffe-Brown had just been lecturing to me on Durkheim’s theory of suicide. He apologised the next day . . . it was the only spark of humanity I ever found in him.<sup>8</sup>

Radcliffe-Brown lectured on legal anthropology, which as a law student would have appealed to Schapera,<sup>9</sup> but his main course of lectures provided a routine ethnological survey of South Africa, interspersed with brief favourable references to Durkheim and put-downs of the evolutionists. Schapera would later pass his lecture notes on to Radcliffe-Brown’s successor, T. T. Barnard, who had come to Cape Town without any knowledge of Africa. Barnard gratefully used them as the basis for his teaching. In due course they constituted the model for Schapera’s own lectures, both at the University of Cape Town and subsequently at the LSE.<sup>10</sup>

Schapera was in the running for a Rhodes Scholarship, but according to his sister Annie he was passed over because candidates were required to have ‘an outside interest’, and he evidently had none. In the event, Radcliffe-Brown took charge of the next step in his career.

I was completing my MA at Cape Town and Radcliffe-Brown, it was his last year in Cape Town, said to me: ‘Schapera, if you get a distinction you get a scholarship, and then you go either to Malinowski in London or Lowie in California.’

He opted for London and the LSE in 1925, just a month after his father’s suicide. However, Malinowski claimed that he had no room for a new student. ‘Seligman is Africa’, he told Schapera. ‘You come from Africa. Would you be a student of Seligman?’<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, ‘On the founding fathers, fieldwork and functionalism: A Conversation with Isaac Schapera’, *American Ethnologist*, 15 (1988), 554–65

<sup>9</sup> In a letter to Haddon, in Dec. 1922, Radcliffe-Brown reported that he was ‘working on the origin of law as illustrated by the African native legal systems. I lectured on the subject last year, and shall make a book of it when I can’. Radcliffe-Brown to Haddon, 18 Dec. 1922. Haddon Papers, Envelope 4, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>10</sup> Schapera passed his notes on to me, and I have deposited them in the library of the London School of Economics.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Kuper, ‘Isaac Schapera—a conversation’, Part 1, p. 5.

'Sligs' Seligman, whose portrait was to hang in Schapera's office in Cape Town, was a veteran of the Torres Straits expedition. He later carried out survey work in the Sudan on behalf of the Sudan government. Seligman purveyed an old-fashioned form of ethnology, short on ideas though long on detail, and mixing cultural, linguistic and biological observations. He was increasingly isolated at the LSE, as Malinowski's influence grew, but his students shared an affectionate regard for him, and he took care of them as best he could. When Schapera's scholarship ran out after two years, Seligman arranged for him to be appointed to an assistantship in the department for a further year so that he could finish his thesis.

Schapera's thesis was based on library sources rather than on field-work. He worked up the material in the British Museum, seated alongside Raymond Firth, who was writing a dissertation on the economics of the Maori, which was also based mainly on secondary sources. (Seats L5 and L6, Firth recalled). Shortly afterwards, Audrey Richards undertook a reanalysis of the literature on Southern Bantu nutrition for her dissertation.<sup>12</sup> Richards and Firth were working under the direction of Malinowski, and they organised their studies with reference to functionalist ideas. Schapera's thesis, however, avoided sociological or historical arguments. Very much in the Seligman mode, it provided a synthesis of what was known about the Bushmen and Hottentot peoples of Southern Africa. (He adopted the umbrella term Khoisan, which had been coined by the German biometrician Leonhard Schultze in 1928, and intended as a biological label.) The thesis was published in 1930, when Schapera was twenty-five years old, with a dedication to Radcliffe-Brown, and it remained the standard reference work for a generation. It was intended as the first volume of a series to be edited by Schapera and Jack Driberg, another student of Seligman, which would 'provide in a scientific manner a comprehensive survey of what is at present known about the racial characters, cultures, and languages of the native peoples of Africa'.<sup>13</sup>

Seligman's students, Schapera, Evans-Pritchard and Driberg, became close friends and they remained loyal to their supervisor. However, Malinowski was transforming anthropology at the LSE, with his functionalist doctrines and Trobriand examples. Even Seligman's students

<sup>12</sup> In her Foreword to the published thesis, Richards thanks Schapera, who 'gave me useful advice from his specialized knowledge of South African cultures', Audrey Richards, *Hunger and Work in a Savage Tribe* (London, 1932), p. vii.

<sup>13</sup> I. Schapera, *The Khosian Peoples of South Africa: Bushmen and Hottentots* (London, 1930), p. v.

attended Malinowski's seminars. They tended to react against his overbearing personality and his dogmas, but Malinowski 'asked you questions', Schapera recalled, 'and you had to think. Now Radcliffe-Brown never made you think. He just dictated. Beautifully clear but—you never thought. Malinowski made you think.'<sup>14</sup> He kept thinking for many years about Malinowski's ideas, but was decidedly ambivalent about the man himself. He recalled travelling with Firth to join Malinowski in Oberbozen, in the Tyrol, during the university vacation in 1927, where one of his duties was to scrub Malinowski down with medicines while he lay naked ('except for a modest piece of cloth covering his genitals') and discoursed on the psychology of kinship.<sup>15</sup> He also said that Malinowski once advised him to change his name, and that he replied that he would do it if Malinowski first changed his. (This was a particularly sensitive matter, since his brother Louis did change his name when he established himself as a physician in London.) Malinowski took him on twice as a research assistant, but sacked him both times. According to Schapera, the first sacking was because he refused to take Malinowski's shoes to be repaired. The second time, Malinowski sent Schapera to the British Museum to find a quote which would prove that Freud had suggested responses to his patients. 'I spent a fortnight reading Freud, came back, and said, "I cannot find anything". He said, "You! Get out!"'<sup>16</sup>

Schapera often spoke of these tensions between Malinowski and himself, and he would refer one to the American edition of *Married Life in an African Tribe*, to which Malinowski had contributed a preface (something Schapera discovered only when he received a copy of the book). Here Malinowski stated that Schapera had been a student of Seligman. ('You see! Not a student of Malinowski at all!') However, Malinowski had written to the publisher to praise the monograph, and the quarrel may have been more complicated than he admitted, since Schapera later felt some remorse—or perhaps apprehension. In June, 1931, he wrote from Mochudi in the Bechuanaland Protectorate to congratulate Malinowski on the award of the Rivers medal, and to apologise:

I am afraid that I left London feeling rather bitter against you, but subsequent reflection has convinced me that I was to blame throughout for the strained nature of our relationship. I feel ashamed to admit that I allowed my youthful conceit to run away with me then, and I can only hope that you will be able to forgive me for the intolerable rudeness I displayed towards you. I have regretted

<sup>14</sup> Adam Kuper, 'Isaac Schapera—a conversation', Part 1, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, 'On the founding fathers', p. 556.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 557.



it bitterly ever since I came out here, especially as I have begun to realize how very much I owe to your kindness and to the stimulus of your teaching.

He went on to describe his research.

The BaKgatla among whom I am working have been affected to a very considerable degree by European influences, and I have got a good deal of interesting data on the nature of the changes brought about by this type of culture contact. What has impressed me most is the fact that although the old tribal ancestor-worship has been well-nigh completely displaced by Christianity, magic still flourishes very strongly, and even church members of high standing still resort to the magician at the beginning of the agricultural season, when they are building new houses, when they are in need of rain, and so on. . . .<sup>17</sup>

Replying with unusual promptness, Malinowski wrote: 'I am extremely glad that you are tackling the changing African.' He went on to accept Schapera's apology. 'I shall not attach any undue importance to past events, which I associate with the state of your health. In this connection may I tell you that you ought to have at least one or two hours exercise every day, graduated Swedish gymnastics are far the best.'

Schapera had started to do fieldwork soon after his return to South Africa in 1929. His decision to situate his research in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, a British colony bordering South Africa, came about largely by chance. Mrs Hoernlé, the anthropologist at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, disposed of some government funds for research. She had been intrigued by reports of an initiation ceremony that was due to take place among the Kgatla in the Transvaal. She had also heard that a new chief was being installed among the Kgatla at Mochudi in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Schapera was despatched to Mochudi. He turned up with the Resident Commissioner for the formal installation in the afternoon, only to learn that the traditional ceremonies had been completed early that morning. He had to rely on the report of a young journalist, whom he would later describe as his first informant. His name was Laurens van der Post. But the plan to move on to the Transvaal Kgatla was abandoned. That afternoon he met the retiring regent, Isang Pilane, who readily fell in with his suggestion that he should make his study in Mochudi.

And two or three days later I was sitting in his house, and he was acting as an interpreter. There were two older women he had called to give me information

<sup>17</sup> This letter and Malinowski's reply, and also Malinowski's correspondence with the American publisher of *Married Life in an African Tribe*, are in the Malinowski collection in the LSE library.

on gods and magic. I was full of magic then. Malinowski had just written a book on that. Then a message comes through to the chief: the missionary wants to see him. He says: 'Tell the missionary to go away. I'm busy writing a book with Dr Schapera.' So when the man treats you like that you don't say: I have got to go to the Transvaal to study backward peoples. And you see that accounts for the sort of anthropology I did. Isang wanted his tribe put on the map.<sup>18</sup>

The following year, 1930, Mrs Hoernlé took a year off from the University of the Witwatersrand, and Schapera was engaged to teach her classes. Among his students were Max Gluckman, Ellen Hellmann, Eileen Krige and Hilda Kuper, all of whom became important figures in the discipline. They had been attracted to the subject by Mrs Hoernlé. A large part of the appeal of her teaching was her engagement with political issues. She was at this time active in a liberal think tank, the South African Institute of Race Relations. Max Gluckman and Hilda Kuper were sympathetic to the Communist Party, Ellen Hellmann was a liberal. According to Max Gluckman, the whole cohort 'either before or after they did field research, believed in the integration of Africans and Whites—and other ethnic groups—within a single social system based on equality of all men'.<sup>19</sup> And this was a fraught political moment. In 1929, after an election that was dominated by the race question, an Afrikaner nationalist government had come to power, with a programme of Afrikaner cultural revival, ethnic mobilisation in politics, job reservation for whites, and racial segregation. It was also to be sympathetic to the Nazi movement in Germany.

Schapera's lectures must have touched on current affairs, or at least on issues of social change, since he claimed that Eileen Krige once walked out of the class complaining that he was teaching sociology and not anthropology.<sup>20</sup> Hilda Kuper recalls, however, that he 'was not an inspiring lecturer, but had wonderful material—you had to tell yourself, "Don't go to sleep, what he is saying is good"'. She added that she remembered best his lectures on law, which contrasted the theories of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski.<sup>21</sup>

During the vacation, Schapera took these students (plus a visiting member of Malinowski's seminar, Camilla Wedgwood) into the field, to

<sup>18</sup> 'Isaac Schapera—a conversation', Part 1, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Max Gluckman, 'Anthropology and Apartheid: The work of South African anthropologists', in Meyer Fortes and Sheila Patterson (eds.), *Studies in African Social Anthropology* (London, 1975).

<sup>20</sup> Kuper, 'Isaac Schapera—a conversation', Part 1, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Hilda Kuper, 'Function, History, Biography', in George W. Stocking, Jr (ed.) *Functionalism Historicized* (Madison, WI, 1984), p. 196.

Mochudi. Hilda Kuper says that the students found it ‘a strange experience’, since they had just been reading Malinowski’s *Argonauts*, with its romantic account of fieldwork. They discovered that this was not Schapera’s style.

Staying usually in a trader’s home, Schapera would sit on a chair in the sunshine, working at a table with his main informant, whom he would get to collect others, and they would discuss and debate. He was very good at asking demanding questions, and he also went to the courts to listen to cases, but it was an approach very different from Malinowski’s. Schapera told us to write down what we saw and heard, but asked us to stay away from his best informant.<sup>22</sup>

His note-keeping was, indeed, remarkably meticulous. Many of his neat files have been deposited in the library at the LSE, and in a note to the archivist when he deposited the notebooks he added a brief explanation of the conventions adopted.

As a rule each entry is headed by the name(s) of the informant(s) and the date of the interview. In the rare instances of its use, ‘o.o.’ refers to an ‘own observation’ (i.e., by I.S.) though usually such observations were recorded separately.

Entries scored through (in pencil, etc.) were subsequently transcribed again, in classified form, on to typed sheets, according to subject matter. These sheets were the main sources used in preparing books or papers for publication.

Schapera worked almost entirely with informants, either specialists (rain doctors, chiefs, elders, etc.) or through the agency of literate assistants, who interviewed their neighbours, friends and relatives on his behalf. These assistants were typically schoolteachers who were temporarily suspended, generally (or so he liked to say) for having made a school-girl pregnant. Schapera paid his assistants and some of his informants a daily rate equivalent to their usual salaries. His assistants collected census and genealogical data, carried out interviews, and wrote essays on topics that interested him. As time went on, and his command of the language improved, he collected more texts in Tswana. He also copied all the documents that came his way, including court records, which he was to mine for many years.

Not only did Schapera depend relatively little on participant observation. His field expeditions were also less extensive than those of the Malinowskians. Between 1929 and 1934 he made annual visits to Mochudi, the Kgatla capital, usually in university vacations, spending just over fourteen months in the field over this period of fifteen years. One

<sup>22</sup> Hilda Kuper, ‘Function, History, Biography’, in George W. Stocking, Jr (ed.) *Functionalism Historicized* (Madison, WI, 1984), p. 196.

advantage was that he gradually achieved a sophisticated command of Setswana. Another was that he could work up historical materials while pursuing ethnographic research. Initially he collected oral histories, village censuses, and genealogies, and focused particularly on marriage, magic, and Christianity. In 1934 he began to do applied studies for the Bechuanaland administration, on law, migrant labour and land tenure. He spent a further four months in 1934 among the Ngwato, and between 1938 and 1943 he made intensive research visits to the Ngwaketse, Kwena and Tawana, and brief visits to the Tlôkwa, Maletse and Rolong.

In 1930, Schapera had joined T. T. Barnard at the University of Cape Town, and settled, once again, in a boarding house, the Mount Nelson hotel. The new discipline Radcliffe-Brown established in Cape Town had survived the rumpus provoked by his political opinions, but it was not in robust health. Barnard was a dilettante, more interested in horticulture than in anthropology. He did no research in South Africa. Students could opt for elective courses in social anthropology over two years of the BA degree, but classes were small. At the undergraduate level, teaching was exclusively in the form of lectures.

In 1935, Barnard retired to Bournemouth, where he devoted himself to growing bulbs, and Schapera succeeded to the chair of social anthropology, at the age of thirty. He did not introduce any radical changes to the syllabus, and seems to have been a dutiful rather than a dedicated university professor. His lectures were concerned largely with South African ethnology, eked out with examples from Kenya, which he had visited briefly on behalf of the International African Institute. David Hammond-Tooke, who came to the department as a master's student in 1947, recalled that Schapera 'seldom raised theoretical issues', though in broad terms endorsing the theories of Radcliffe-Brown. 'We did not hear an awful lot about Malinowski'. The text books he prescribed for undergraduates were Goldenweiser's *Anthropology*, Linton's *Study of Man* and Seligman's *Races of Africa*. During the war years he made a point of addressing racist theories. (He came up with a definition of the Aryan as a man with a white skin, a thick skin, and a foreskin.) However, issues of government policy and social change were handled by Jack Simons, a member of the South African Communist Party.<sup>23</sup>

He was more active in broader academic circles, particularly in the national network of what was called 'African Studies' or 'Bantu Studies'.

<sup>23</sup> W. D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters: South Africa's Anthropologists 1920–1990* (Johannesburg, 1997), pp. 39–41.

The prime minister, Jan Smuts, had begun to provide funds for African studies in the early 1920s, although the anthropologists complained that he gave much more money for archaeology than for ethnography. However, the Hertzog government that came into power in 1929 was deeply suspicious of liberal academics. In 1931 it discontinued support for the Union Advisory Committee on African Studies and Research, which had brought together the main academics in the various universities to disburse the government block grant. The academics now established the Inter-University Committee for African Affairs, which affiliated itself to the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in London. Led by Rheinallt Jones, director of the liberal Institute of Race Relations, who had launched the journal *Bantu Studies*, the Committee brought together representatives of English and Afrikaans language universities, and included Jabavu from the Fort Hare Native College. Schapera served a term as chairman, and seems to have maintained good relations with all sides, but strains were soon apparent between the liberal faction from the English-language universities and the leaders of the Afrikaner team, Eiselen and Lestrade.<sup>24</sup> These became more urgent as the new government developed plans for thorough-going racial separation. G. P. Lestrade, who had established the Ethnological Section of the Department of Native Affairs in 1925, advocated separate development for the black population. Werner Eiselen became an advocate of separate 'Bantu' education. The radical historian Macmillan issued a blanket denunciation of the anthropologists as 'paralysed conservatives'<sup>25</sup> but Hoernlé and Schapera did articulate an alternative perspective, which recalled Radcliffe-Brown's view of South Africa.

During this fraught period, Schapera edited two survey volumes, *Western Civilization and the Natives of South Africa: Studies in Culture Contact*, which appeared in 1934, and *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa: An Ethnographical Survey*, published in 1937. Both were written largely by members of the Interuniversity Committee on African Affairs. His Preface to the volume on Western Civilization opened with a restatement of Radcliffe-Brown's thesis: 'Europeans' and 'Natives' 'have exercised a steadily growing influence upon each other's lives . . . It is no longer possible for the two races to develop apart from each other.'

<sup>24</sup> The material in this paragraph is drawn from Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters*, pp. 45–8.

<sup>25</sup> H. Macmillan, "'Paralyzed Conservatives'": W. M. Macmillan, the Social Scientists and the Common Society, 1923–1948', in H. Macmillan and S. Marks (eds.), *Africa and Empire: W. M. Macmillan, Historian and Social Critic* (London, 1989).

Lestrade, and the Native Economic Commission, had advocated a policy of strict segregation, euphemistically dubbed 'adaptation'. Schapera argued that segregation, premised on the revival of 'traditional culture', was impractical in South Africa. Inexorable changes had been in train for over a century. There was no way in which this process could be stopped, or even controlled, short of imposing totalitarian rule.

The successful pursuit of an adaptationist policy must of necessity involve complete authoritarian control of all possible influences by the administration. Changes in one aspect of culture inevitably react upon other aspects; and there is little purpose in the Administration's attempting to bolster up the Chieftainship and Native legal institutions, the family and parental control, when the sanctions and privileges upon which they rest are at the same time being steadily undermined by the missionary, the teacher, the trader, the labour recruiter, and the farmer . . .

A thorough-going policy of adaptation thus calls for complete segregation of the Native under absolute administrative control extending to every aspect of life. As things now are in South Africa, this condition is not likely to be realized. Moreover, even if the policy were feasible, what is to be its final outcome? What place is to be given ultimately to the Native in the social and political system of the country? This question the Native Economic Commission shirks completely.

He concluded that: 'Bantu culture will change and develop, drawing most of its impetus from the elements of our own civilization, no matter what we can now do or how we attempt to control it. The best we can hope to achieve is so to regulate our active participation in the process of change as to avoid conflict and disaster.'<sup>26</sup>

Most of the chapters in the volume *Western Civilization* were studiously neutral in tone, but some contributions reflected the full range of perspectives on African policy. Eiselen attacked the British missionaries who had been promoting assimilation of the Africans; an economist, W. H. Hutt, prophesied that capitalism would bring about a free labour market; while Jabavu contributed a chapter entitled (though perhaps not by his own choice) simply 'Bantu Grievances'. In his contribution to *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes*, the historian J. S. Marais wrote that 'the position of Natives throughout the country has become worse since 1910. Rights they formerly enjoyed have been abolished or have become precarious; the principle of anti-Native discrimination has been extended into a number of new fields, and new ways of enforcing it have been devised.'<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> I. Schapera, 'Preface' to I. Schapera (ed.) *Western Civilization and the Natives of South Africa: Studies in Culture Contact* (London, 1934), pp. ix–xiv.

<sup>27</sup> J. S. Marais, 'The Imposition and Nature of European Control', in I. Schapera (ed.), *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa: An Ethnographical Survey* (London, 1937), p. 355.

Schapera summed up his own views in a chapter entitled 'Cultural Changes in Tribal Life':

Of the Bantu as a whole it can be said that they have now been drawn permanently into the orbit of Western civilization. They do not, and probably will not, carry on that civilization in its purely European manifestations. It is more likely that in certain directions at least they will develop their own local variations. But these variations will be within the framework of a common South African civilization, shared in by both Black and White, and presenting certain peculiarities based directly upon the fact of their juxtaposition. Already such a civilization is developing, a civilization in which the Europeans at present occupy the position of a race-proud and privileged aristocracy, while the Natives, although economically indispensable, are confined to a menial status from which few of them are able to emerge with success. There has grown up among the Europeans an ideal of race purity and race dominance, according to which the integrity of White blood and White civilization must be maintained at all costs. And so we find special legislation and usages of social intercourse directed on the one hand against miscegenation and on the other erecting artificial barriers against the cultural advancement of the Blacks. But despite all this, the Bantu are being drawn more and more into the common cultural life of South Africa . . .<sup>28</sup>

Yet the battle-lines were not drawn simply between the segregationists and the assimilationists, and Schapera's position was not without its ambiguities. Malinowski, who visited South Africa in 1934, as a guest speaker at a conference of African education, discerned a process of cultural syncretism at work. Perhaps influenced by the first studies of Africans in Johannesburg, which had been carried out under the direction of Mrs Hoernlé,<sup>29</sup> he argued that a dynamic mixed culture was emerging in the city slum yards, and would spread.<sup>30</sup> This view was endorsed by Z. K. Matthews, a professor at Fort Hare Native College who studied with Malinowski and became a leading figure in the ANC.<sup>31</sup> It was, however, rejected by Radcliffe-Brown, who insisted that the crucial developments were in the field of social organisation, tribal societies being drawn into national political and economic relationships.<sup>32</sup> Schapera developed

<sup>28</sup> I. Schapera, 'Cultural Changes in Tribal Life', in I. Schapera (ed.), *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa: An Ethnographical Survey* (London, 1937), pp. 386–7.

<sup>29</sup> Ellen Hellmann undertook the first study of an African slum, in the early 1930s, and she was soon followed by E. J. Krige and Hilda Beemer. The most significant of these studies was Hellmann, *Rooiyard: A Sociological Survey of an Urban Native Slum Yard* (published in 1948 by the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, but based on a thesis submitted in 1934).

<sup>30</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, 'Introduction' to *Methods of Study of Culture Contact in Africa*, London: International African Institute, Memorandum XV, 1938.

<sup>31</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 'The Tribal Spirit among Educated South Africans', *Man*, 35 (1935), article 26.

<sup>32</sup> See especially A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'On Social Structure', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 70 (1940), 1–12.

Radcliffe-Brown's perspective in his contribution to the volume on 'cultural change' in Africa that was published by the International African Institute in 1938 under Malinowski's direction.<sup>33</sup>

But Malinowski also endorsed 'a sophisticated nationalism or tribalism' that 'can still draw full strength from the enormous residues of old tradition'.<sup>34</sup> He formed an alliance with the Swazi King, Sobhuza, who had been influenced by the Zulu cultural movement, Inkhata, which was established in 1922, and who was promoting a neo-traditionalist policy.<sup>35</sup> Sobhuza came to the education conference in Johannesburg to press for the revival of Swazi initiation ceremonies. He argued that they would provide young Swazi with a sense of identity and discipline. His initiative faced opposition from missionaries, and some educated, Christian Swazi, but Hoernlé and Schapera had visited Swaziland earlier in 1934 at the invitation of members of the administration, and written an official report which recommended the revival of the regimental system.

Malinowski may have been influenced by sympathy for the nationalist movements within the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, but in Africa the endorsement of particularist ethnic movements generally implied support for authoritarian chiefs, and might even be taken as lending support to policies of segregation. These choices were less stark in the economically undeveloped British Protectorates than in the Union, and the implications were different in Swaziland, where Sobhuza was a neo-traditionalist, and in Bechuanaland, where the major chiefs were active modernisers (although Schapera's friend Isang also encouraged the selective preservation of traditional values and tried to foster tribal patriotism).<sup>36</sup> But whatever their views on Christianity or education, these chiefs were united in their support of their prerogatives. In his essays on political institutions and on the law in *The Bantu-speaking Peoples*, Schapera insisted on the primary authority of the Chief, and he generally represented the Tswana chiefs as agents of progressive change, although he did criticise some of their excesses. (However, when he gave me his copy of the pamphlet on the administration of Bechuanaland that had been published in 1932 by the radical commentators, Margaret Hodgson and W. G. Ballinger, I found that he had marked up passages in which they criticised the administration's reliance upon the chiefs, who, Hodgson and

<sup>33</sup> I. Schapera, 'Contact Between European and Native in South Africa' in *Methods of Study of Culture Contact in Africa*, London: International African Institution, Memorandum XV, 1938.

<sup>34</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Dynamics of Culture Change* (New Haven, 1945), p. 158.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Cocks, 'The King and I', *History of the Human Sciences*, 13:4 (2000).

<sup>36</sup> I. Schapera, *Married Life in an African Tribe* (London, 1940), p. 351.



Ballinger wrote, 'seem to have had only one idea, to preserve their own powers, and consequently to preserve the conditions on which these powers are based.')<sup>37</sup>

Schapera's ethnography is nevertheless free of the celebration of traditional leaders that characterised some contemporary South African studies, notably *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* (1943) by E. Jensen Krige and J. D. Krige, and Hilda Kuper's *An African Aristocracy* (1947). Nor did he defend British policy in the Protectorates. His first significant papers on the Kgatla dealt with the complex but largely detrimental consequences of labour migration and with the sometimes perverse effects of mission policies, which undermined family values and eroded traditional safeguards on sexual morality.<sup>38</sup>

More broadly, his research in the 1930s and 1940s was distinguished by a concern with 'social change', a focus endorsed in South Africa by Mrs Hoernlé and, latterly, by Malinowski in London. Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, published in 1922, had opened with a lament for the 'cruel irony that just as the importance of the facts and conclusions of ethnological research is . . . becoming recognised, . . . the material of our science is vanishing'. In a paper published in 1929 in *Africa*, entitled 'Practical anthropology', Malinowski abandoned this elegiac tone and demanded an 'anthropology of the changing native'.<sup>39</sup> This reflected the fact that the Colonial Office was at last showing an interest in social and legal research in Africa. Schapera was soon to profit from the new agenda.

The Colonial Office had begun to reform the system of indirect rule in Africa, and in 1934 the Bechuanaland administration duly issued two reform bills, the Natives Tribunal Proclamation and the Natives Administration Proclamation. These substantially limited the powers of the chiefs, and introduced new tribal councils and a hierarchy of customary

<sup>37</sup> Margaret L. Hodgson and W. G. Ballinger, *Bechuanaland Protectorate*, Britain in South Africa (no. 2) (Alice, Eastern Cape, 1932).

<sup>38</sup> I. Schapera, 'Premarital pregnancy and native opinion: A note on social change', *Africa*, 6 (1) (1933), 59–89; 'Labour migration from a Bechuanaland Native Reserve, Part 1', *Journal of the African Society*, 32 (1933), 386–97; 'The BaKxatla BaxaKgafêla: A preliminary report of field investigations', *Africa*, 6 (4) (1933), 4–2–12; 'Economic conditions in a Bechuanaland Native Reserve', *South African Journal of Science*, 30 (1934), 633–55; 'Labour migration from a Bechuanaland Native Reserve, Part 2', *Journal of the African Society*, 33 (1934), 49–58. See also his two essays in a general journal, *The Critic*, 1933, 'The native as letter-writer' (2: 20–28), and 1934, 'The aspirations of native school children' (2: 152–62). This series of essays was to foreshadow much of his more extensive publications in the next decade.

<sup>39</sup> B. Malinowski, 'Practical anthropology', *Africa*, 2 (1929), 22–38.

courts. In the years immediately prior to the Proclamations, the administration had been particularly exercised by disputes with Tshekedi Khama, regent of the largest tribe, the Ngwato. Tshekedi and other influential chiefs now feared that their authority was under threat. They certainly had grounds for their concern. The new High Commissioner, Lt-Col. Rey, had written in his diary soon after taking office in 1929 that the chiefs ‘practically do as they like—punish, fine, tax and generally play hell. Of course their subjects hate them but daren’t complain to us; if they did their lives would be made impossible.’<sup>40</sup>

This was the background to Schapera’s first commission from the Bechuanaland Protectorate administration, but there was also a more specific impetus. In debates in the Native Advisory Council, representatives had remarked that a young generation of chiefs were coming to office who were ignorant of Tswana traditions and would need guidance in the administration of the law.<sup>41</sup> It was partly in response to these concerns, and partly in order to help magistrates in their work, that the administration decided to commission a handbook of Tswana law. Schapera volunteered to take this on, and began work in 1934.

In his introduction to the *Handbook*, Schapera remarked that it was a book of laws and not a study of the role of law in society. He would therefore not deal with theoretical questions. He also ‘had to resist the temptation’ to discuss ‘the extent to which various laws are actually enforced or obeyed in practice, the many subterfuges employed to circumvent the law, the occasional violation of recognised court procedure and principles of justice by autocratic, biased, or venal Chiefs or headmen, and the surreptitious exercise of power and rights now declared illegal by the Administration’. To treat such matters, he noted, would cause resentment. In any case, these machinations were ‘after all, abuses of the law and not part of the law itself’. But he promised a further study (which he never wrote) that would deal ‘with Tswana government and law as actually seen in practice, and not merely as represented in the statement of formal principles here given.’<sup>42</sup>

He also noted that there was not a single body of customary law that applied throughout Bechuanaland. Individual chiefs had introduced

<sup>40</sup> Cited by Diana Wylie, *A Little God: The Twilight of Patriarchy in a Southern African Chieftdom* (Hanover, NH, 1990), p. 114. Wylie gives an excellent account of these measures and their political context, pp. 107–17.

<sup>41</sup> See Rey’s ‘Introduction’ to I. Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom: Compiled for the Bechuanaland Administration* (London: 1938).

<sup>42</sup> I. Schapera, ‘Preface’ to *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom: Compiled for the Bechuanaland Administration* (London, 1938), p. xi.

regulations of their own, some for instance, banning bridewealth, others insisting on it, and even setting rates of payment. (In practice, the *Handbook* noted mainly divergences between the Kgatla and the Ngwato. He did not have adequate information on other tribal courts.)

Finally, he explained that the *Handbook* was not a compilation of the ancient body of Tswana law. His aim was to give a statement of the laws that were in force at the time. This was the most original feature of Schapera's codification, the insistence on the emergence of a modern Tswana law, fed by traditional principles but also by tribal and governmental legislation, and responsive to social changes in the society. The creative role of tribal legislation was documented in another study, which he rewrote many years later to illustrate the principle that individual chiefs could and did influence the direction of social change.<sup>43</sup>

Yet while Schapera did his best to avoid theoretical debates in the *Handbook*, he could not evade some fundamental problems.<sup>44</sup> He cited no authorities, but his view of law was based on the familiar positivist dictum of Oliver Wendell Holmes and Roscoe Pound that law is what the courts enforce. The Tswana had two relevant terms: *mokgwa*, and *molao*.<sup>45</sup> He translated the first as custom and the second as law, and submitted that the Tswana distinction reflected the fact that courts punished breaches of law but not of custom.<sup>46</sup> He admitted, however, that this distinction was difficult to maintain. In the absence of a published code of law, the courts 'have to deal with customary rules of behaviour, with traditional usages habitually followed by the people and regarded as more or less binding and obligatory'. It was therefore 'impossible to isolate legal rules absolutely from other rules of conduct'. He suggested that the criterion for identifying a law should be the probability that the court would enforce a particular rule, but had to concede that this was a straightforward calculation. Different tribal courts followed their own precedents, and even a single court was not always consistent. In practice, Schapera himself implicitly decided which rules should be codified as laws.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> I. Schapera, *Tribal Legislation among the Tswana of the Bechuanaland Protectorate: A Study in the Mechanism of Cultural Change*, London School of Economics, Monographs on Social Anthropology, 9 (1943). This was substantially recast and reissued in 1970 under the title *Tribal Innovators: Tswana Chiefs and Social Change 1795–1940*, London School of Economics, Monographs on Social Anthropology, 43.

<sup>44</sup> But see Simon Roberts, 'Introduction' to new edition of *Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* (Münster, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> He was to use these terms in the title of a collection of texts on Tswana custom published in Tswana. I. Schapera, *Mekgwa le Melaô ya Botswana* (Alice, Eastern Cape, 1938).

<sup>46</sup> Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom*, p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37–8.

The internal classification of laws raised similar problems. 'In practice, although not in theory,' Schapera remarked, 'Tswana law is divided by the people themselves into two main classes', corresponding to the conventional distinction between civil and criminal matters. However, a variety of cases were resolved by the award of civil damages and by the imposition of criminal penalty. If law was what the courts enforced, then Tswana law was not neatly divided into criminal and civil departments.<sup>48</sup>

Special copies of the *Handbook* were distributed to chiefs and magistrates, interleaved with blank pages to allow them to write comments. Tshekedi was particularly upset by the occasional aspersions on the chiefs, but he and his colleagues were more exercised by the limitations on their judicial authority imposed by the Proclamations. These were watered down in 1943. In the meantime, the *Handbook* itself became a widely used source both in Tswana courts and in political disputes.<sup>49</sup>

The Bechuanaland Administration was content with his *Handbook*, and Schapera was given two other major commissions, one to report on labour migration, the other on problems of land tenure. He made several reports to the government on specific problems of land tenure, some of which are reported in the book, which also provides a masterly overview of the Tswana laws and practices regarding property. But the monograph on *Land Tenure* is perhaps notable chiefly for its final chapter, in which Schapera explored the problems raised by the Tswana habit of living in large towns. Chiefs insisted that this concentration of the population was necessary for the maintenance of order. Indeed, if a prominent man moved his family out of the town this could be interpreted as a sign of incipient revolt. There were economic and environmental arguments on the other side. Schapera reviewed the issues with judicious neutrality.<sup>50</sup>

His report on labour migration brought together and analysed all the available statistical data. He insisted on the role of the chiefs in stimulating migration (from which they profited through various payments and impositions), and assessed the mixed economic and social consequences. As ever, Schapera offered a balanced account of costs and benefits. Finally, he considered possible remedies, emphasising particularly that the government should address the 'push' factor that drove people out of the country to seek work. He suggested that the chiefs' right to demand unpaid labour should be curtailed. He recommended a reduction in the

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46–7.

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g., Wylie, *A Little God* (1990), p. 172.

<sup>50</sup> I. Schapera, *Native Land Tenure in the Bechuanaland Protectorate* (Alice, Eastern Cape, 1943), especially ch. XV.

tax burden that forced many men to go abroad, and remarked that rural development projects might make it easier to earn money at home. However, he refused to support any statutory restrictions on labour migration.<sup>51</sup>

In 1940, Schapera published another and very different study of social change, his one attempt to reach a broader audience. *Married Life in an African Tribe* was surely inspired by the success of Malinowski's *Sexual Life of Savages*. Published in 1929, just when Schapera made his first visit to Mochudi, it had caused something of a sensation, although Malinowski's book did not match the sales of Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, which had appeared a year earlier, in 1928. Schapera presented his own study as a 'social history'. He did not intend, he wrote, to contribute to theoretical debates on family and marriage. 'My object has been rather to describe in a straightforward manner how the Kgatla family has changed and what sort of life it leads today.'<sup>52</sup> Drawing on letters and often startlingly frank personal statements (usually collected by his assistants) Schapera described in unprecedented detail courtship, love affairs, and sexual practices, including masturbation and homosexuality, and documented the day-to-day life of married people. But while Mead and Malinowski had celebrated the sexual freedom of Trobrianders and Samoans, Schapera painted a bleak picture of the love life of the Tswana.

If I appear to have stressed the unhappy marriages too much, and to have paid little attention to the happy ones that do also exist, it is because the latter, so far as I could judge, are comparatively rare. Few of the women I got to know well enough to talk to on this topic pretended to be living harmoniously with their husband. Almost always there were complaints of sexual ill-treatment or of infidelity, and the characteristic female attitude was one of resignation rather than of happiness. . . . the polygamous ideal still prevails and the virtually enforced monogamy of to-day has not been accompanied by the true companionship upon which a successful union should rest.<sup>53</sup>

Not only were husband and wife frequently at odds. Parents demanded obedience from their children, in the old style, but modern children were often financially independent and had gained an education that distanced them from the older generation. 'The conditions of modern Kgatla life

<sup>51</sup> I. Schapera, *Migrant Labour and Tribal Life: A Study of Conditions in the Bechuanaland Protectorate* (London, 1947).

<sup>52</sup> I. Schapera, 'Preface' to *Married Life in an African Tribe* (London, 1940), p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Schapera, *Married Life in an African Tribe*, p. 212.

almost inevitably produce strained family relationships.<sup>54</sup> Domestic discord was fostered by migrant labour, the schools, and the perverse influence of the missionaries on domestic institutions. 'Western civilization, through the changes it has produced, must be held mainly responsible for the lack of happiness and contentment now so frequently observed in married life, although there is little to suggest that even in the old days these emotional satisfactions were a common feature of the Kgatla family system.'<sup>55</sup>

The book caused some local controversy. Tshekedi Khama was shocked by its sexual frankness, and so was the Archbishop of Cape Town. Schapera received a radio call in the field from the Principal of the University of Cape Town: 'Serious complaints have been made on account of your book. Will you please come back to answer them.' In retrospect Schapera said the problem was that 'according to my description of sexual intercourse amongst the Kgatla, it was very much like the way the civilized, Europeans committed sex. There was nothing exotic about this. That's what . . . annoyed the serious crowd in Cape Town.'<sup>56</sup> In any case, the fuss blew over, but despite the best efforts of the Archbishop, the book never became a best-seller,<sup>57</sup> perhaps precisely because of the lack of exoticism, but also because the Tswana did not seem to be having more fun than anyone else. On both counts, *Married Life* was a striking, perhaps dispiriting contrast to the popular studies of sex and marriage produced by Mead and Malinowski.

In his contribution to *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (1950), Schapera described the pattern of cousin marriage among the Tswana, relating it to the political structure of the tribes and documenting changes over four generations.<sup>58</sup> This was one of the very few studies of preferential marriage in Africa that was backed up by good statistics. He also published studies of the demographic studies of Tswana wards, and a monograph on *The Ethnic Composition of Tswana Tribes* (1952). Many years later he published a short monograph on magic, *Rainmaking Rites of Tswana Tribes* (1971), which provided an insight into the manipulation of magical objects to sustain power within Tswana royal families.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>56</sup> Adam Kuper, 'Isaac Schapera—A conversation', Part 2, *Anthropology Today*, 18 (Feb. 2002), 16.

<sup>57</sup> It was reissued by Penguin in 1971, but did not catch on.

<sup>58</sup> I. Schapera, 'Kinship and Marriage among the Tswana', in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde (eds.), *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London, 1950).

He also had an interest in ethnohistory, collecting oral traditions and editing ethnographic reports dating from the earliest days of contact to the diaries and letters of nineteenth-century missionaries. This historical curiosity was exceptional in British social anthropology at the time, although it fitted into a well-established tradition of research in South Africa. He published ethnographic and historical notes in Tswana that were popular with local readers, and in 1965 he edited and annotated a collection of the praise poems of the Tswana chiefs.<sup>59</sup>

Taken together, his publications on the Tswana represent the most complete individual contribution to the ethnography of an African people. They provide the baseline for modern studies of Botswana, and are valued by the educated people in the country. Suzette Heald, who taught anthropology at the University of Botswana, remarked that in Botswana ‘his name lives on in many ways—in a road named after him in the capital Gaborone, and in his “home” village of Mochudi where he was patron of the Phuthadikobo Museum, which effectively stands as a memorial, displaying many of his photographs. One of the first acts of the newly formed University of Botswana, in 1985, was to award him an honorary doctorate, and a photograph of this event is reproduced in the current University prospectus.’<sup>60</sup>

By the late 1940s Schapera’s fieldwork days were over, and in 1950 he moved from Cape Town to London. Smuts’s wartime government had been defeated by the Afrikaner Nationalist party in elections in 1948. The new government introduced a rigorous policy of segregation, under the intellectual guidance of two former professors at the University of Stellenbosch, Hendrik Verwoerd and the ethnologist Werner Eiselen. Schapera would later deny that his move to London had anything to do with the change of regime in South Africa. In the accounts of his move that he gave after his retirement he would represent himself as having passively responded to the initiatives of his friends. Evans-Pritchard had encouraged him to apply for the vacant Cambridge chair, though later switching his support to Fortes, who was appointed. At the same moment, without evidently advising him, Firth had put Schapera up for a professorship at the LSE. (In both cases, incidentally, Audrey Richards had been shut out.)

<sup>59</sup> I. Schapera, *Mekgwa le Melaô ya Botswana* (Alice, Eastern Cape, 1938); *Ditirafalô ya Botswana ba lefatshê la Tshireletsô* (Alice, Eastern Cape, 1940); *Praise Poems of Tswana Chiefs* (Oxford, 1965).

<sup>60</sup> Suzette Heald, ‘The legacy of Isaac Schapera’, *Anthropology Today*, 19 (6) (2003), 18–19.

Schapera found a serviced room in the White House Hotel off the Euston Road, where he was to remain for half a century. A new routine was established. Mornings would be spent at the LSE, where he would lunch. He then walked home and spent the afternoons at his desk. In the evenings he would drink whisky and read. Where possible weekends would be spent with old friends, especially the South Africa connection, Meyer Fortes, Max Gluckman and Joe Loudon (who had been his student in Cape Town). Evans-Pritchard would sometimes camp on his floor when he visited London, and share his whisky. (*Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* was the only ethnographic monograph Schapera kept by his bedside.) The Firths would have him to their home in Highgate for Sunday lunches. Every year he would visit Holland to spend a week with a former student, Hans Holleman, who was Professor of African Studies at Leiden University, and when I succeeded Holleman, Schapera would come across and spend a week with each of us.

But while he could be warm and entertaining, he had the set habits of the confirmed bachelor. He had once been briefly engaged to be married to Hilda Beemer (Kuper), but he had no enduring love affairs. There was a time when his drinking would cause trouble, particularly with the wives of his friends, and he became lonelier than ever as his friends died—Evans-Pritchard in 1973, Gluckman in 1975, Fortes in 1983. On a visit to Cape Town shortly after his retirement he had an emergency operation on a suspected cancer that resulted in permanent damage to his vocal chords. This made him self-conscious and reluctant to meet new people. But he became friendly with younger colleagues at the LSE and with the new generation of ethnographers and historians in Botswana. And his great-niece Carol offered him a home from home.

At the LSE he was a loyal lieutenant to Firth. He would complain that Firth was too interested in personal power, although Schapera was ready to use patronage to help friends. He felt that Firth underrated his achievement, but their relationship was generally smooth. Firth was the central figure in the national anthropological institutions, and when Schapera dutifully served terms as President of the Royal Anthropological Institute and Chair of the Association of Social Anthropologists, he would consult Firth on important questions, and he supported Firth's policies in the British Academy to which he was elected in 1958.

His most enduring contributions in his London years were the collection of praise poems of Tswana chiefs, some going back several hundred years, and his editions of David Livingstone's letters and journals. Five



volumes appeared between 1959 and 1972<sup>61</sup> and they became essential sources for Livingstone studies. Although he continued to teach and to write about South Africa, he would now confine himself largely to comparative essays based on the traditional ethnographic materials.

His teaching at the LSE followed the pattern of his courses in Cape Town. He would synthesise South African ethnography under various conventional headings, and sometimes test sociological theories against this ethnographic record, usually to destruction. In 1950, shortly after arriving in England, he delivered the Josiah Mason Lectures at the University of Birmingham. Invited to discuss 'politics and law in primitive society', he chose to confine himself to

the forms and functions of primitive governments, which in contrast with law are still a relatively unexplored field of study. I have also confined the range of illustrative material to four separate groups of peoples living in South Africa. This I have done in the belief that detailed and systematic comparison of even a few different types of society, all occurring in a single region, is likely to provide a more satisfactory basis for generalization than scattered and fragmentary citations of the kind originally attempted and still far too common in the literature of social anthropology. In effect the book is now a study of primitive governments in South Africa, not of 'primitive government' in general . . .<sup>62</sup>

This focus on 'primitive government' was in marked contrast to Schapera's studies on the effects of colonial rule, but British social anthropology was now moving away from 'applied' research. *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, published in 1950, was a collection of timeless accounts of 'traditional' institutions. This was true even of the chapters by Schapera and Richards, both of whom had written about the great changes in marriage and family life. There was a vogue for what was termed 'theoretical work', and this was distinguished by the avoidance of any consideration of colonial realities. However, *Government and Politics in Tribal Societies* did raise some pertinent questions about conventional theories (for example, demonstrating that Gluckman was quite wrong to suggest that rebellions in 'tribal society' seldom resulted in tribal fission).

<sup>61</sup> I. Schapera (ed.), *Livingstone's Private Journals, 1851–1853* (London, 1960); *Livingstone's Missionary Correspondence, 1841–1856* (London, 1961); *Livingstone's African Journal, 1853–1856*, 2 vols. (London, 1963); *David Livingstone's South African Papers, 1849–1853* (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1972).

<sup>62</sup> I. Schapera, *Government and Politics in Tribal Societies* (London, 1956).

And Schapera's method of regional comparison, though by no means original, was persuasively defended and it influenced other scholars.<sup>63</sup>

Schapera took early retirement from the LSE in 1969, bored with teaching (never his forte), and unsympathetic to the student insurgency of the time. Orderly and ascetic, lonely, liable to depression, he had a way of erasing the past. He never kept letters, and the only review of any of his books that was found among his papers was a rare unfavourable appreciation, by Eileen Krige. He seldom returned to the places in which he had spent the important years of his life. After completing his research in Mochudi in 1934, he returned to the town only once, for a week. After leaving South Africa in 1950, he went back on visits only three times to Cape Town (once to receive an honorary doctorate from the University), and only twice to Botswana, all brief visits. He rarely visited the LSE after his retirement. But a new generation of loyal friends visited him regularly, and he enjoyed gossiping about anthropologists, and keeping up with new research on South Africa.

His work had been the centre of his life, and he felt diminished when, well into his seventies, he found he had stopped writing. He never stopped reading, however. Although he was eclectic in his tastes, he favoured nineteenth-century English novels, Pepys's diaries, and the Bible, all of which he liked to read as ethnographic documents (he published essays on Cain's sin, and on the use of kin terms in Jane Austen's novels).<sup>64</sup> He regretted that he had forgotten his Hebrew, but he forgot little else. To the very end he would effortlessly quote poetry (the Victorians again), reel off scholarly references when asked for help, copy-edit one's essays with intimidating precision, and tell pointed anecdotes of his teachers and contemporaries, stories that tended to improve with each retelling.

He was frail but in good health to the end. He died from a heart attack, apparently while cooking himself breakfast, on 26 June 2003.

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<sup>63</sup> I. Schapera, 'Some comments on comparative method in social anthropology', *American Anthropologist*, 55 (1953), 353–62.

<sup>64</sup> I. Schapera, 'The sin of Cain', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 85 (1955), 33–43; *Kinship Terminology in Jane Austen's Novels*, Occasional Paper of the Royal Anthropological Institute, No. 33 (London, 1977).

*Note.* I am grateful to Carol Sensky and Allan Lichtenstein for information on Isaac Schapera's family background.

A complete bibliography of Schapera's published work has been compiled by Suzette Heald, and is available on the internet. (Isaac Schapera: A Bibliography. <http://www.thuto.org/schapera/resource/bibl.html>.)