

FLOWS OF SEXUAL SUBSTANCE: THE SEXUAL NETWORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

THE MEANING OF SEX IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Expressions of sexuality and acts of sex have been treated as ‘behaviour’—that is, as individual acts primarily motivated by ‘internal’ psychological states of mind or body—in most of the social scientific and psychological literature, while cultural studies and literary approaches have treated it in categorical (as ‘gender’), cultural (‘representations’), or discourse (after Foucault). A cultural anthropological model, by contrast, must seek to understand the symbolic and semiotic dimensions of sex and sexuality in southern Africa. Here I examine the ‘traditional’ culture of sex and sexuality relying in large part on data from traditional healers (*sangomas*) in order to discover the deeper meanings of sexuality that link it to marriage and marriage payments (*lobola, bogadi*), gift exchange (‘payment’, exchange of services such as cooking or use of accommodation, or affection), reproduction, and recreational uses of sex. Sex can be better understood as being *productive* of identities rather than a reflex of gender (masculinity, femininity), and its social function in ‘traditional’ southern African societies can be better understood in terms of ‘flows’ of ‘sexual substance’ between males and females, with concomitant ‘flows’ of material goods. We can see that ‘sexual substance’ flows along the same traces of the sexual network that HIV does; it is part of the same linked system of social relations. Where anthropologists have studied flows of gifts, property, wealth and value through the legitimate network of sexual relations that we call ‘kinship systems’, in this case we observe a broader field of relations that go beyond ‘kinship’, but have many of the same characteristics.

Incidents

Several incidents over the last five years focus our attention on aspects of sex and notions of blood, body and sex in South African culture— what we might call the national consciousness of sex and AIDS.¹ These incidents concern the rape of children, the fear that a group of female sangomas expressed about the danger to men of sexual fluids, and accusations of rape against Jacob Zuma, the former Deputy President, former chairman of the South African National AIDS Council, and former husband of the first ANC Minister of Health. These incidents expose issues involving sex and the flow of sexual fluids—what I shall call here, ‘sexual substance’. These concepts are crucial component of the structures of kinship, family and the continuity of generations, and above all, of the configuration and durability of South African sexual networks.

¹ I use the phrase ‘South African culture’ with some trepidation and acknowledge a certain lack of exactitude. South Africa, in fact, is as much or more ‘multi-cultural’ as most large contemporary nations. I simply wish to focus attention on certain aspects which would appear to be common to a South African culture since they are treated as such by the public media and in political discourse. Sex and AIDS, and issues that are related to these, seem to have achieved this status of shared national representations and discourses.

Baby Tshepang

In the remote city of Uppington in the far north of the sparsely populated near desert province of Northern Cape, four men went on trial in 2001 for the rape of a 9 month old baby. On October 27, in Louisvale a small township near Uppington, the mother had left the child alone while she was drinking, and came back to find it crying and bleeding. The baby survived after reconstructive surgery, and after many months the men were eventually found not guilty. The baby became known as 'baby Tshepang'. Later that same year in the Johannesburg neighbourhood of Joubert Park, another baby was similarly raped when its mother left it in a squalid room in the tenement near downtown Johannesburg in which they lived. These two cases stirred, but not for the first time, a huge outcry in the press and in parliament about how and why these horrible crimes could have happened.

These stories quickly became part of the South African social consciousness. The incident near Uppington inspired a play, *Tshepang*, by Lara Foot Newton.² The play, though based on the true story is fictionalised in a way that generalises its content since, in that year (2001), approximately 21,000 rapes of children were reported.³ The play is a restrained and harrowing, brutal yet sensitive response to these facts. It exposes the poverty of emotional resources as much as the economic poverty of the main protagonists and attempts to explain the rape as a consequence of the previous severe childhood abuse of the rapist who turns out to be the impoverished mother's boyfriend. A repeated line, as if from the chorus of a Greek tragedy—'Nothing ever happens here'—exposes the multiple dimensions of poverty that is social, economic, moral and emotional. The play is powerfully effective in conveying a sense of the weight of past abuse and violence that must be carried by those who have suffered it. In the play this is dramatised for the mother by making her carry a baby's cradle strapped to her back, a symbol of both her embodiment of the violence, her shared guilt, and grief. Although addressed to, and experienced by only the very small theatre-going audience in South Africa, it does suggest the cultural significance that events of this kind have come to have in the first decade of the twenty-first century South Africa. It makes an effort to come to terms with sexual brutality of this kind, an effort that is also seen in other aspects of South African life, from the popular press such as *The Sun* (a sensationalist tabloid popular in Soweto), for instance, to community radio stations that are heard by the majority. The incident, once brought to the public attention, soon elicited many other stories of the rape of children in South Africa. Baby Tshepang was placed in foster care. In the play as in the press, the cause of the evil is held to be social rather than individual, collective rather than personal. Blame is not assigned to the person but to 'the people'.

The outcome of the second high-profile case in Johannesburg has been extensively discussed by Claudia Ford who adopted the baby and wrote a book about the process.⁴ This child is now a healthy and happy child after reconstructive surgery and loving care. These cases are exceptional, however. The vast majority of children who are raped are not cared for in any way out of the ordinary, and very few prosecutions result in conviction.

² 'Tshepang: The Third Testament' is a play by Lara Foot Newton (2005), was first performed at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival, 3-5 July, 2003, and has been performed several times in South Africa and the UK. It has been performed for instance, at the Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, London (UK Premier, 21 September – 16 October 2004), at the Dublin Theatre Festival (October 2005); The Barney Simon, Theatre, Market Theatre, Johannesburg, March, 2005, and at the Wits University Theatre (where I saw it), among others.

³ For statistics on rape of children, the category was defined as those under 18 years of age in the police statistics. Dempster 2001; CNN, 2001, Swarns 2002.

⁴ Ford 2005.

Emerging out of these cases a consensus formed around the notion that many men—especially poor uneducated black men—believe that AIDS could be cured by having sex with a virgin. It was believed that they had selected babies of around one or two years old because they were guaranteed to be virgins. This ‘explanation’ has never been confirmed as a motive by the actual perpetrators of these crimes, and may therefore be more the stuff of ‘urban legends’. Whatever the status of this belief, and whether or not it actually motivates rape of this kind, it has captured the South African imagination. The claim that some people hold the belief has, at least, the *status* of fact. It has been targeted by AIDS interventions and education programmes. The newspapers and TV channels carry ‘educational’ messages that ‘sex with a virgin will not cure you of AIDS’. Community education literature on HIV/AIDS similarly carries warnings that this is not the case. Whether or not it is actually believed, or that it actually motivates some criminals, it appears to be sufficiently plausible to be a belief, and some, indeed, might act on it. The intense focus on this apparent absurdity, however, directs our attention to the connection between sex and healing, sex and age or life-stage, and values attached to the presence or absence of sex in the process of healing and illness. Specifically, it points to a notion that sex has a power to ‘heal’ and that some ‘power’ or ‘substance’ in female virgins can effect changes in the male. The healing takes place through flows between people, not within any single person. Healing, like illness, has social causes.

‘We are killing our men’

In another time and place, I sat with a group of sangomas who were attending a training workshop on HIV/AIDS in Acornhoek, a small town in the lowveld region of Limpopo Province. The facilitator told them that they should advise all of their clients to use condoms, and as is usual in such workshops, demonstrated how a condom should be put onto the penis. He used a broomstick to demonstrate although this caused much derisive laughter about how unrealistic a broomstick was as a model. Since a great deal of the healer’s work concerns sexual or romantic problems, they were scarcely naïve about penises. In particular, the healers declared, the condom could interfere with sex, and cause poor health, or even disease and madness. Discussion, however, centred on the dangers of condoms. Condoms, it was declared, could cause a dangerous ‘back-up’ of semen in the male and therefore lead to dangerous illness. Furthermore, condoms could come off and ‘disappear’ inside the woman. It was held, however, that condoms could be useful in preventing male contact with menstrual blood, a substance that was truly dangerous, and could also prevent contact with women who had recently attended funerals and who thus carried a dangerous impurity that could kill men. ‘We are killing our men’, one woman declared, by not being sufficiently careful about preventing such dangerous contact with menstrual fluid and in not strictly avoiding sex after contact with death. The discussion of HIV had been sidetracked into discussion of other kinds of dangerous substances that could be absorbed by men through sexual contact with women.⁵ None of the women spoke of specific incidents, but spoke instead of categories (men and women) and of flows between them. There were no specific shocking instances, or couples named; talk was of general flows through networks of lovers. They might have been epidemiologists talking about randomised contagions. In fact, they were concerned with their own networks of relations.

Many if not most African traditional healers prefer not to recommend condoms; partly because they believe that their own medicines are more effective in preventing HIV transmission or STIs, but also because they believe that condoms present significant dangers. Many people in South Africa believe that lubrication on condoms, or so-called ‘condom oil’ was absorbed by

⁵ This case was observed in Acornhoek, Northern Province, at a meeting of the Traditional Healers Organisation, led by the founder of the organisation, Nhlavana Maseko, in 1995.

both men and women during sex with condoms and that this led to impurity of the blood that could only be treated with traditional medicines.⁶ I have heard, too, that some people fear ‘worms’ in packaged condoms that can be seen if a small amount of water is placed in the condom and it is held up to the sunlight.⁷ Others say that condoms can ‘get inside’ women or that it can ‘blow up in the uterus’ and cause damage or death. Some fear that the semen that ought to flow out is forced back into the man’s blood by the condom and thus causes a new form of illness. All of these beliefs limit use of condoms, and thus may have consequences for public health, but they also point towards some important cultural truths. These cases and beliefs suggest strongly that substances—menstrual blood, ‘pollution’ from death and funerals, or substances from the condoms themselves—can be absorbed into the bodies of both sexual partners. Some informants suggest that sex with a condom is not really sex at all.⁸

Jacob Zuma’s shower

At the beginning of 2006, the trial of the former Deputy President, Mr. Jacob Zuma for rape brought sex and beliefs about sex into the South African public consciousness again with great force. Sex and AIDS these days is never far from the public consciousness in South Africa, but the Zuma trial brought anxieties about politics, power, gender and sex into close connection with each other and raised interest to a near fever pitch. The judge delivered his judgment on Monday, 8 May 2006. The entire reading of the judgment was publicly broadcast on several of South Africa’s leading radio channels with millions of listeners. After six weeks of hearings in the Johannesburg High Court, the judge found Zuma not guilty of rape. There was never any question that penetrative sex had occurred and that Zuma had not used a condom. The judge ruled, however, that the sex appeared to have been consensual.

Although the judgment evoked some surprise, especially among the AIDS activists and women’s groups that had held demonstrations throughout most of the court’s proceedings in the street outside of the court building in downtown Johannesburg, most people agreed that the judgment itself was correct: although there were many ambiguities involved in the testimony about the event, there was simply not enough evidence to convict of rape, and much circumstantial evidence to suggest that the woman had not explicitly resisted sexual intercourse. What emerged from the case was evidence of a different kind, evidence of beliefs about sex, desire and the body that might have been difficult to elicit in any other way. Before his removal from the government as the result of indictment on corruption charges, Zuma had been a member of the presidential AIDS commission and had declared himself to be a force for moral regeneration. In the aftermath of the baby Tshepang rape stories, Zuma had told reporters that he blamed apartheid for ‘sowing the seeds for the breakdown of the institution of the family,’ and explained that the molestation of children and infants today is a symptom of this degeneration.⁹ Such generalities are simply not helpful in advancing our understanding of the rape ‘epidemic’ in South Africa; significantly, Zuma did not attempt to use this logic in defending himself.

⁶ Wojcicki and Malala 2001.

⁷ I have tried this. If a small amount of water is put into a condom and it is held up to a strong light, cloudy white streaks that look something like worms can indeed be seen. This may be the result of partial mixing of the lubricant and water that causes differential refraction of sunlight through the swirling mixture, or from reflections from the latex sides of the condom.

⁸ Collins and Stadler 2001:333, Stadler 2003.

⁹ Dempster 2001.

The 31 year old woman who accused Zuma claimed that she thought of him as ‘a father figure.’ Zuma, however, said that the woman had sexually enticed him by wearing what he called a ‘kanga’. A kanga, also called *libia* in Zulu, is a brightly coloured piece of cloth measuring approximately 1.8 meters by 1.2 meters. These are used and worn by women throughout eastern and southern Africa, and usually signify respect. In rural areas they are worn over the clothing as a symbol of modesty, and in Zulu, Swazi and Xhosa custom, particularly, no woman should greet a chief of village headman without wearing one. Thus, the idea that wearing this type of cloth suggested sexual availability provoked outrage. Second, Zuma was questioned whether he was aware that his accuser was HIV positive and was known as an AIDS activist. Zuma declared that he had known, but told the court that he had taken a shower after sex so that he would not be infected with HIV. Even after the trial he defended this statement, saying he had showered ‘for hygiene’ and ‘because I knew the type of person I was sleeping with.’¹⁰ He also said that he thought the risk of infection was sufficiently low to be worth taking the chance.

Finally, Zuma told the court that according to ‘Zulu culture’, he was obligated to have sex with a woman whom he believed to be aroused. Not to do so, he stated, would have been disrespectful of the woman and would have made her angry with him. He testified under oath that when he perceived her to be ready, ‘I said to myself, I know as we grew up in the Zulu culture you don't leave a woman in that situation, because if you do then she will even have you arrested and say that you are a rapist.’¹¹

While the judge’s verdict was widely accepted by the South African public, his comments about HIV and sex during the trial and afterwards caused reactions from ‘debate’ to outrage. The popular cartoon series ‘Madam and Eve’¹² that runs in many of South Africa’s newspapers lampooned Zuma’s remarks about his shower (Figure 10.1 to Figure 10.4). In this humorous treatment of ‘Zuma’s shower’ the confusion and misdirection that Zuma caused is highlighted.



Figure 10.1. 'Madam and Eve' : Zuma's shower (1) [MTV is a subscription TV channel]

¹⁰ Maughan, Karyn. ‘Zuma stands his ground on shower comment’ IOL.com May 10 2006 at 05:55AM. http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=3011&art_id=vn20060510004406115C497518; also published in *The Star*, 10 May 2006, p.1.

¹¹ Eugene Soros (Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa) Zuma Trial Heightens Rape Awareness. Wordpress.com. April 29, 2006 <http://www.worldpress.org/Africa/2329.cfm#down>

¹² The cartoon strip, drawn by ‘Stephen Francis and Rico’ is syndicated in many South African newspapers. There is also a spin-off TV weekly sitcom. The basic ‘situation’ for the comedy is the household of a White upper-middle class South African family, especially ‘Madam’, the head of the household, her elderly gin-drinking mother, and Eve, her domestic worker who is also part of the family. Such a situation is not at all uncommon in contemporary South Africa. The strip often offers trenchant but humorous criticism of South African politics, culture and society. See [Www.madamandeve.co.za](http://www.madamandeve.co.za)



Figure 10.2. 'Madam and Eve' :Zuma's shower (2). The radio interviewee is Jacob Zuma.



Figure 10.3. 'Madam and Eve': Zuma's shower (3). Confusion.



Figure 10.4. 'Madam and Eve': Zuma's shower (4). The 'damage control' call centre.

Reacting to the verdict, Stephen Lewis, the UN special envoy for AIDS in Africa, spoke out against Zuma's 'ignorance.' Speaking in Nairobi, Kenya, at the meeting of the African Union, Lewis said,

I feel embarrassed for the African leadership and, if you will forgive me, that has been the situation in South Africa where the voice of political leadership has been both confused and confusing. ... I don't think anything can compensate for the damage that [Zuma] has done.¹³

But Zuma's case showed the degree to which 'tradition'—in this case 'Zulu culture'—has entered mainstream national discourse on sex. Here 'tradition' is held to legitimise sexual behaviour that would perhaps ordinarily be considered out of the ordinary if not perverse. It also points toward the way in which the discourse about sex has entered the national mainstream. On the main page of WWW.IOL.COM, one of the leading South African

¹³ 'UN envoy slams Zuma for hurting Aids fight'. IOL.com, May 10, 2006 at 09:48 PM. http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=3011&art_id=qw114728148499B243

Internet sites and service providers, 'The Zuma rape trial' was *the* main index heading, followed by 'Development', 'Education', 'Environment', 'Finance/Labour' and other topics. Indeed, even the UN Special Envoy on AIDS in Africa stepped into the debate. Zuma's comments were compared with the president's idiosyncratic view that poverty, not HIV, causes AIDS and the minister of health's 'controversial' promotion of a diet of olive oil, garlic and beetroot to cure HIV. Zuma's comments demonstrated that the South African leadership is, as Stephen Lewis remarked, 'confused and confusing'. Nevertheless, their beliefs are sincerely held and reflect much deeper understandings of sex and AIDS that they share with the larger South African public.

Unlike Uganda, then, where the bio-medical view of AIDS has been fully accepted, and where Ugandans do not seek to deny the existence of AIDS and its causes, South Africa remains in 2006 deeply ambivalent about it, and continues to be poorly led.

TOWARDS A MODEL OF SEXUAL MEANINGS

These notions of sex and sexuality point towards a cultural understanding of sex and sexuality—widely current in southern Africa—in which some sexually transmitted substance flows between both sexual partners. It is embedded in a *cultural*—or, as this is coded in South Africa, 'traditional'—discourse of persons, values, bodies and exchanges rather than in the bio-medical discourse of bodies as biological organisms, or the psychiatric and psychological discourse of cognition, desire and repression.

We already have in anthropology a rich tradition of theory about the person, values and exchange, but this body of theory has not been widely applied to understanding of sexuality in Africa.¹⁴ This may help to expand our conceptualisation of sexuality *as* culture in a way that goes beyond the more simplistic notions of 'cultural influence'.¹⁵ A theory of 'cultural influence' holds that 'culture', as an external and separate domain compared with sexuality, may *influence* the specific content of sexuality, but maintains the essentialist premise that sexuality is ultimately universal and biological. A theoretical position that holds that sexuality is part and parcel of culture and that sexuality itself has its own cultural tenets and structures goes beyond such a cultural influence model towards a model of sexuality embedded in culture and the culture embedded in sexuality.

Based on extensive conversations with traditional healers, South Africans of many backgrounds, and using evidence from the press and radio, I describe a model that will help to explain what may be local and culturally different meanings associated with sexuality and the practices of sex in southern Africa. As a model, it is necessarily abstract—a conceptual or heuristic system developed on the basis of observations, interview data, casual conversation with diverse people, and from the sources of popular culture. Like other models—the 'Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism', the 'Iroquois system of kinship', the 'law' of supply and demand, the theory of 'contagious magic', or monotheism—it is rarely, if ever, found in a 'pure form', fully instantiated in practice. Instead, it seeks to isolate a set of related phenomena and to construct an explanation based on rules of internal consistency and critical coherence rather than empirically demonstrable 'truth'. The power of such models is their heuristic value in discovering 'underlying' (that is, not empirically 'visible') orders of meaning that can be said to shape life in complex ways. This is also the weakness of the 'model' in social science: it is often difficult if not impossible to fully evaluate its validity. This is true of most of the 'grand

¹⁴ For example, Lambeck and Strathern 1998; Strathern 1988.

¹⁵ Vance 1999: 44-46, 48.

narratives' as well as of lower level theoretical constructs that seek to deal with issues such as witchcraft, interpersonal violence, or literary genres, since these take their form through practice and their own genealogies rather than through specific command or explicit specification (as law or bureaucratic order does, for instance). Nevertheless, the model that is developed here is intended to explore specific areas of cultural difference associated with a geographical and cultural community, that of southern Africa. As such, it does not specify race. The actual 'distributions' of meanings associated with this model's 'system' remains an open question.

South African conceptualisation of sexuality and the body

Contemporary southern African representations of the body and practices of sexuality point toward a concept of 'flows' of bodily substance and gifts that go both ways in the (hetero-)sexual¹⁶ encounter, that is, both men and women absorb the sexual fluids of each other in a sexual contact. This implies a concept of the person that is permeable to both physical and 'spiritual' substances of other persons, rather than—or perhaps in addition to—a ('Western') concept of 'the individual'.¹⁷ Specifically, South Africans seem to understand sex as involving a permeation of the body by any substance involved in sexual contact, and that this is potentially a threat to both males and females. It suggests a different concept of the biological boundaries of the person that is rooted in cultural concepts of the body, especially the sexual body. This has far-reaching effects in decisions about use of condoms, but more than this, points towards a set of distinctive beliefs about sex that must be understood in terms of representations of the body, of sex and sexuality, and of the notion of the nature of the person in southern African society.

According to the cultural precepts of South African traditional culture, sex itself is part of human nature, something everyone engages in.

People do have sex because it is nature and it was created. It is part of life. Women and men ... it really does not matter who you are.¹⁸

Sex is for pleasure. It is for the nation and people.¹⁹

Typically, South Africans believe that the body fluids that result from sexual arousal and orgasm derive from the blood. Blood is 'hot' and is 'heated' by sexual desire and arousal causing a portion of it to be secreted. In a study of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour in Acornhoek, Limpopo Province, Collins and Stadler concluded that male 'sexual desire was considered to stem from the need to drain ... increased volume of blood from the body [while] semen and vaginal secretions were believed to be 'blood that is hot'. They found that the group of adolescents with whom they worked believed that 'during sexual intercourse the 'blood' of a woman and a man were ... exchanged or mixed together'.²⁰ In the same context, female desire

¹⁶ The 'hetero-' designation here is neither prescriptive nor descriptive, since I am not certain to what extent what I say here applies equally well to same-sex sexuality. It is clear, however, that same-sex sexuality can not be entirely classified under the European semantic categories of 'homosexual' or 'gay', since many people in such relationships do not consider themselves to fall under these categories. Black South African same-sex relationship often adopt the cultural gender patterns of 'male' and 'female' regardless of the biological sex of the participants (e.g. Donham 1998; Moodie, Ndatshe & Sibuye 1988; Moodie & Ndatshe 1994; Gear 2005: 90; Van Onselen 1984; Harries 1994). Whether what I attempt to say applies equally to same-sex sex, I cannot say. I leave the question open.

¹⁷ cf Niehaus 2001:15.

¹⁸ Interview: Traditional Dr. D S Mthembu, Umnonjaneni Section, Tembisa; 10 March 2002.

¹⁹ Interview: Nomxolisi Dandaza, nursing sister and *thwasa*, 'initiate'.

²⁰ Collins and Stadler 2001: 330.

is similarly understood as deriving from the blood: 'Her blood will tell her how to act' said one young woman in Acornhoek. 'She will think she is old enough for sex once she begins to menstruate'.²¹ Jeannerat reports that older Venda women say that once she stops menstruating a woman no longer has sexual desire since 'her blood is no longer coming'.²² Sex under these circumstances becomes dangerous:

If she would engage in sexual intercourse, the semen of her husband could no longer be washed out of her uterus by the menstrual flow and its accumulation would cause her stomach to swell up as if she were pregnant. After nine months the stomach would burst and the woman would die.

Thus semen and vaginal fluids are no different from menstrual fluids, or blood itself, in the folk models of their derivation. The SeSotho word *madi* may mean both blood and semen,²³ as does the Zulu word for blood/semen, *igazi*. Since blood is also what is passed down to subsequent generations through conception and birth, and since this is what connects the ancestors with the living, it is a source of power that is comprehended cosmologically.

According to traditional healers and, therefore, to many ordinary South Africans, the flow of blood across the generations, from grandparents to children and to subsequent generations, is understood to be literally physical. It is not 'blood' as spiritual symbol or as some transcendent substance that stands for, or represents the continuity of the blood line, but actual blood that flows from one generation to another. Since vaginal fluids and semen are identical to blood, the conception of a child from the blood of the mother and of the father, allows the blood to flow directly across the generations. The ancestors are physically connected to the living through this link constituted by the real flow of sexual substance.

This is illustrated in Figure 10.5.

²¹ Collins and Stadler 2001: 331.

²² Jeannerat 1997: 72.

²³ In SeSotho, *madi* may also mean 'money' (*mali* in Zulu), since the /d/ and /l/ phoneme tend towards the same sound, an rapid alveolar flap, and SeSotho speakers frequently borrow the Zulu word, *mali*, 'money', into their own lexicons with sound shifts into the SeSotho sound system. See Niehaus 2001; Ingstad 1990:34.

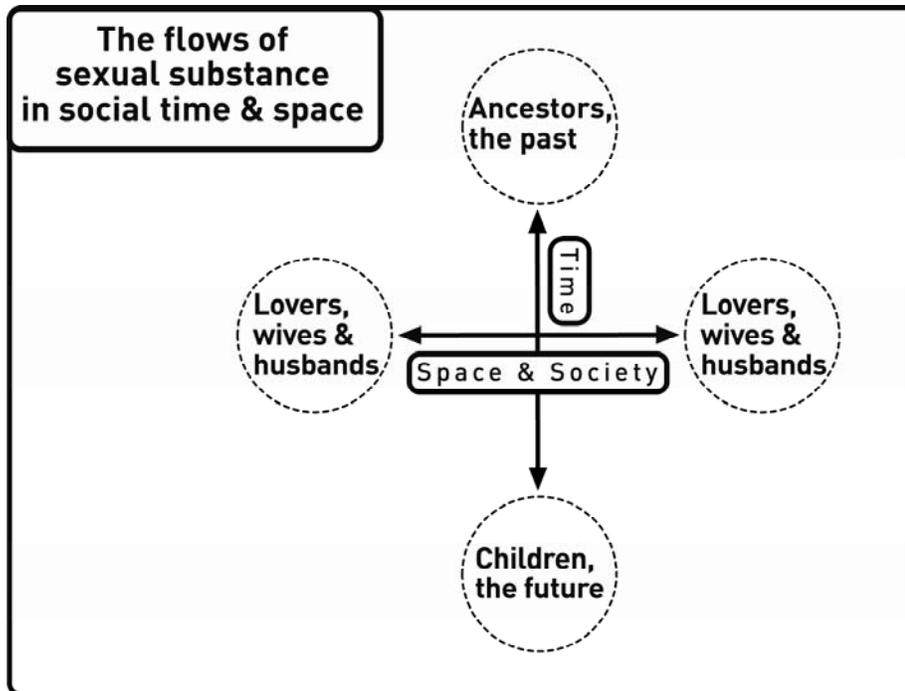


Figure 10.5. Flows of Sexual Substance in Social Time and Space

Sex, therefore, is implicated in flows that move in two directions: through the generations and through time (shown in Figure 10.5 as the vertical axis), and across space and society through the medium of networks of sexual partners (shown on the horizontal axis in the diagram). In cultural terms, of course, time is not necessarily seen as 'vertical' since people are linked to the graves of the ancestors' and to living sites that have previously been occupied. Flow of blood across generations, and of sexual substances between persons represent different dimensions of relationship in the same social universe. These constitute a landscape of both the living and the dead, of the ancestors (*amadloti*), and of people (*abantu*), which is, like the physical earth, a physical connection between different kinds and orders of being. In everyday life, the 'dimension' of generational time is embodied in the imagined landscape of the space of life and death. The landscapes that most people imagine is a network of places where ancestors and elder family members live, or have lived and are buried, and includes the places where kin and children currently live, have sex and babies, and eventually die. Pathways (roads, highways, footpaths) and frequent travel to visit the living or graves of the dead make this network real. Similarly, the domain of social relations, including sexual relations is not separable from time since sexual and other social relations change through time. The model presented here is meant rather to indicate the nexus between two separate dimensions in which the sexual act necessarily takes place, that is, at a particular moment in time, and with certain cultural intentions and social implications. Each sex act is the nodal point in a network of relationships that exist in a landscape of meaning.

In this worldview, the ancestors are still with us and influence us because their blood is our blood, but also because their earth is the earth we also walk upon and in which we will eventually be buried, too. Sex lies at the centre of this. Blood or semen that flow—both over time from generation to generation, and across partners from male to female and female to male—is not conceptualised as a metaphor. It is real, physical blood that is transferred through sexual exchanges. When sex results in conception of a child, the child's blood is therefore also the ancestors' blood which the child will ultimately pass on to subsequent generations.

In the temporal dimension, blood/semen ‘flows’ down from previous generations to future generations through the medium of those currently alive. This is understood to be a real flow of real substances that actually and materially constitute our bodies. The blood of the ancestors is our blood, and it will be passed on to future generations as the same blood. Implicitly, it seems that ‘blood’ (and semen) are transmitted from one person to another through sexual reproduction (and other forms of sexuality), through time and across generations and therefore are also permanent—enduring as long as life endures. They are transmissible but non-transitory substances. As such they constitute a flow of value across the generation and can be thought of as a kind of currency that is exchanged across generations. They are the wealth of the nation (*mali ya sechaba*) that enables people not only to survive, but to understand their survival as part of an on-going exchange across time that links generations in a permanent and enduring way. The sexual networks of South African society, then, are not limited to the living since they also include, implicitly, the blood/semen of the ancestors as well. When relationships break down between lovers or within the family, ideally the ancestors should be first asked to intervene. This is done by calling them at the grave side, if possible, or by offering them the blood of sacrificial chickens, goats or, in extreme cases, a cow or bullock. This is called *kupahla*, to call the ancestors with a gift. Thus, a gift of blood and value flows back to them in a counter exchange within the network. This is the first resort advised by southern African traditional healers, since ancestors keep watch over social relationships above all, including sexual ones.

In the ‘social’ (horizontal) dimension, people who are living today—lovers, husbands and wives—exchange their ‘substance’ through sexual acts that link persons in networks of relations that involve exchanges of other kinds of currency in addition to the ‘sexual currency’ of semen and vaginal fluid. In other words, sex is not held to be merely or even primarily for reproduction, but is itself a legitimate part of daily transactions among persons in which things of value are exchanged. The sexual exchange is necessarily implicated in a broader flow of values, some of which are physical or economic values (use of a car or cell phone, a place to sleep, a new dress or clothes) and some of which are intangible values such as a good conversation, a shared joke, a good time or a sense of closeness and intimacy. Sexuality participates, in other words, in a network of reciprocal exchange of ‘gifts’ that link people as lovers just as the ‘gift’ of blood and life from the ancestors links the living and their potential descendants in a reciprocal exchange network across time. Since blood/semen is both transmissible and non-transitory, it can play a role, like other durable goods, in such an exchange and creates the same sense of reciprocal rights and obligations that exchange of other durable goods creates.

Thus, the South African sexual network is sustained by constant flows of sexual substance, but also of many other kinds of value, things and services. This takes place within a cosmology that understands the ancestors as being among us, albeit unseen. These acts of exchange allow people to imagine their communities of kin, comrades and fellow citizens, but the sexual network itself is never imagined, never represented. It remains a hidden, occult structure, one which is nevertheless responsible for the transmission of HIV. The unseen structure of the sexual network is the *unimagined* community.

In these terms, Jacob Zuma’s declaration that he would be violating the woman’s ‘human right to sex’ if he refused what he took to be her advances, is not as absurd as it might at first seem. The ‘right to sex’, while not generally articulated as one of the principle ‘human rights’ upheld by the UN or the South African constitution, can be understood as a right to engage in fundamental exchanges of a valued substance that sex entails. Taken in this way, Zuma was invoking South African ideologies of sex, kinship and *Ubuntu*/ ‘humanity’. Other testimony in the trial showed that Zuma had already ‘helped’ his accuser with cash and efforts to find her a

place in an overseas educational establishment. It would not be unusual to expect an exchange of sex for such services in many similar South African situations. While his invocation of 'Zulu culture' scarcely excuses the unprotected sex with whatever coercion might have existed, the continued acceptance of Zuma as a leader in South Africa suggests that he had indeed struck some cultural chords that resonated with many ordinary South Africans.

A sexual link, created through sexual action is an enduring social relation that connects people who have sex (or who have had sex) with one another in an enduring networks of relations. This is represented in Figure 10.5 as a 'horizontal' dimension. The role that sex plays in South Africa is far more than just a reproductive one. Several authors have pointed to the significance that 'fertility' often plays in African cultures. This has been most comprehensively summarised by the Caldwells and their collaborators in a series of articles that attempted to highlight the significance of sexual networks in the AIDS epidemic.²⁴ While reproduction and fertility are important in South Africa, and children certainly welcome, compared to the ritual emphasis placed on fertility in many other parts of Africa, South Africans seem to see sex in broader terms. Since South African societies, especially as they exist today often place little importance on 'lineage' or 'clan'—except, perhaps, in chiefly and royal families such as that of the Zulu king, amongst others—fertility as such has less to do with maintenance of kinship and property regimes, and more to do with contemporaneous exchanges in networks of relations. This helps to lay the foundation for the extent and interconnection of sexual networks that has been discussed in previous chapters.

This linkage puts sexuality, and the partners involved in sexuality, at a crucial cosmological nexus that involves the flow of 'blood' through generations and the flow of sexual substance (also understood as 'blood' or derived from blood) across social networks of persons that are linked through sexual contact and all of its implications including trust, mistrust, jealousy, mutual powers and vulnerabilities, and love (or hate). It also places sex at the juncture between the power of the ancestral spirits and the power of the 'bush' or 'nature' that lie in the broader landscape. This is represented in Figure 10.6.

²⁴ Caldwell, Caldwell & Quiggin 1989; Caldwell, Caldwell & Quiggin 1991; Caldwell, Caldwell, & Orubuloye 1992; Caldwell & Caldwell 1996; Caldwell 2005.

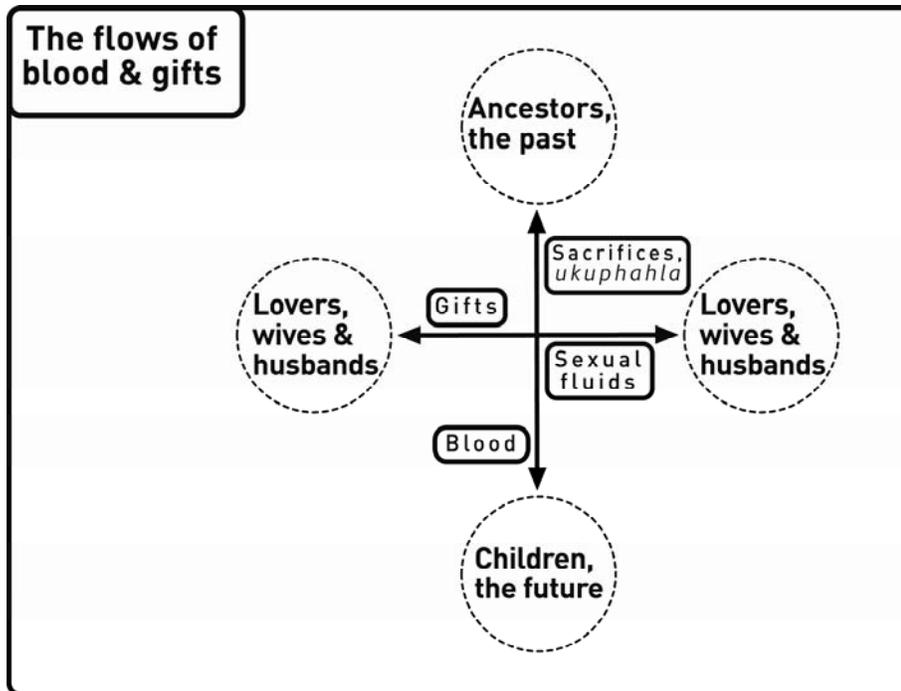


Figure 10.6. Sexuality as Exchange of Blood and Gifts

Sexual flows among the network of lovers or spouses also involve concomitant flows of other kinds of valuables such as cattle, money, clothes, and other objects of value. This is especially true in bride-wealth payments, called *lobola* in the Nguni languages²⁵ and *bogadi* in the Sotho-Tswana languages. *Lobola/bogadi* involves an exchange of wealth (generally expressed in terms of cattle as units of value, but paid in currency or other items of value) that formally passes from the man/husband's family to the woman/wife's family. Other gifts from the bride's family also pass to the husband, and since the full *lobola/bogadi* is rarely paid in full, the exchange is often nearly balanced between the two families. The promised but unpaid *lobola* stands as a contingent debt. The flow of gifts from the living to the ancestors is similar: never fully complete, always contingent, and ideally balanced. Similarly, the flow across generations should be acknowledged—and often is—with appropriate and regular sacrifices of animals for the ancestors in exchange for blessings, protection and luck that only the ancestors (or other spirits) can ultimately bestow. The gifts given to the ancestors through sacrifice involve both the actual blood of the animal as well as its value. They are thought of as being equivalent to the exchanges of goods that take place at marriages. *Lobola* exchanges, in other words, are the same as the exchanges involved in *ukupahla*. Both create and maintain relationships through flows of substance and value. The ancestors are therefore party to every exchange of a sexual or kinship kind.

The two flows may interact disastrously as, for instance, at times of death when contact with a corpse makes sex with others dangerous because of impurities in the body of anyone polluted by contact with death. At this point of rupture at the end of life, sex must also be interrupted. This can also be understood in terms of exchange of 'substances' that occurs in all social

²⁵ The Nguni grouping of South African Bantu languages includes Zulu, Xhosa, and Swazi, while the other major family of languages, Sotho-Tswana includes the North Sotho (Pedi), the South Sotho, Ndebele and Tswana. Tsonga (Shangaan) also uses the term *lobolo*, although it is not part of the Nguni grouping.

interactions, including those involved with death. People ‘infect’ one another on a daily basis, not just through sexual contact, but also through their other personal ‘substances’—breath, spirit, and ‘presence’ or ‘shadow’ [*seriti* (Sotho), or *isithunzi* (isiZulu)]. As long as these substances are shared in daily life, life goes on. But death interrupts these flows and thus leads to contamination since the reciprocity of exchanges of ‘substance’ through normal interaction is interrupted, too. If the contamination of death is not removed by means of ritual intervention, then it can be transmitted to others, especially through sexual contact. This causes illness and might even lead to death.

The sangoma’s fear of condoms then can also be seen in this light. Both condoms and death interrupt the flow of sexual substance. While death does so permanently, interrupting the flow of substance in daily life, the condom does so temporarily. Both death and condoms, then, constitute rupture of the social fabric and, ideally, should be avoided. When the female sangomas said that were ‘killing their men’ they meant that rupture of flow of this kind leads to illness, morbidity and ultimately to death, in their view.

An act of sex is, therefore, both a personal joining together of bodily substance and a simultaneous conjuncture of cosmological principles. These two flows implicate and entail each other and create life in several ways. Any sexual act is potentially a procreative act, but also helps to mutually ‘create’ the partners themselves through mixing of their bodily substances, through creating new social identities (‘the lover of X’) and through affirmation of each partner’s own sexuality and sense of masculine/feminine identity. As a procreative act—even only a potential one—sex creates the children through whom one’s own blood will continue to flow. As a ‘re-creational’ act, that is, one that re-affirms and possibly elaborates on one’s own social identity, ‘recreational’ (non-procreative) sex is also a creative act. The two acts of ‘creation’ exist as a single bodily performance—sexual intercourse—that lies at the juncture of two dimensions in the work of making persons.

Sex, therefore, is imbued with curative or healing powers but, precisely because of this power, presents special dangers and requires certain avoidances (taboos). It is never simply an act of pleasure divorced from the universe of kin, friends and lovers or from the universe of spirits, god(s) and witches. Both appeals to ancestors and medicines from the bush (‘nature’) have significant powers to influence the outcome of sexual acts: to protect against sexually transmitted infections, to ‘cleanse’ pollution that derives from sexual acts, to cleanse unclean conditions that interfere with sexual relations (such as attending a funeral), or to capture a lover’s affections, to prevent intercourse with someone else’s lover, and many other kinds of love magic. The herbal medicines of the ‘bush’, or *muti*, are used to treat sexual dysfunction (such as impotence), STIs, infertility, and as love magic because the power of herbs is linked both to the ancestors and to the landscape in which they are found. Their powers derive, that is, from both the flow of spirit through generations, and the flow of spiritual influences across and through the landscape.²⁶ Sexually transmitted diseases are communicated through the blood, too, according to traditional healers and traditional health beliefs. South African traditional healers say, for instance, that

STDs are caused by the uncleanness of the blood such as when people sleep together and one party is not pure you can transmit the disease to the next person.²⁷

Or,

STD can be transmitted sexually but basically it is the impurity of the blood.²⁸

²⁶ Thornton 2000.

²⁷ Interview: Tr. Dr. D S Mthembu, Umnonjaneni section in Tembisa; 10 March 2002.

The power of herbs in treating sexual problems is thus also linked to the two dimensional flow of 'blood' and spirit that characterise the African cosmological conception of man's place in nature.

Sexuality is thus not 'natural' in the Euro-American 'biological' sense, but specific to human nature as a social being. It is experienced as an organic 'need' like hunger. Like hunger, it can be controlled, satisfied or thwarted by products of the land. Pervasive metaphors in African languages for sex involving food, foodstuffs and eating testify to this. Yet, it is fundamentally inter-organic, taking its form through multiple organic persons, and transcends the 'mere' organic by involving spirits of ancestors and the creation of children for whom one's (sexual, reproductive) self will eventually stand as ancestor. It is creative of humans and created by them, but not by them alone. Sexuality provokes intense arousal and desire, but also dread, fear and loathing. The act of sex creates bonds between persons, but also dissolves them through jealousy. It is, like most other human or spiritual powers in the southern African cosmologies: inherently socially unstable and morally ambiguous. It is both bad *and* good, desired *and* feared, therapeutic *and* pathogenic.

Sex also creates personal identities. A female virgin becomes a 'woman' through sex, but more than this, a 'wife'. When a female person's identity changes from 'girl' to 'woman' she acquires not only an identity but also a role. She enters into a web of diffuse and multiplex relations with the man with whom she has had sex. Except for thoroughly modernised or 'westernised' women, this implies a complex set of duties and obligations. There is little sense in more traditional African communities of an isolated sexual act merely for the sake of pleasure. The exchange of bodily substance implies other exchanges and the relationship thus constituted is open-ended and multi-stranded. Minimally, a woman who has sex with a man—unless it is a purely commercial transaction, that is, prostitution—is expected to cook for him, clean for him, and above all 'respect' (*ukuhlonipa*) him. Such relationships may segue into what is regarded as 'traditional marriage' or 'customary marriage' if they endure long enough. They do not necessarily imply sexual exclusivity. Thus a woman may have such a set of complex duties and expectations with several men. This is part of being a 'woman', that is, playing the role that the identity conferred by sex entails. While male persons acquire their identity as 'men' in some black South African communities through circumcision, they acquire their masculinity—and through this, their 'respect'—through sex. They also acquire a set of diffuse, usually unstated, obligations to 'support' their woman by giving them gifts such as clothes, food, and other benefits. Stereotypically, these are the 'three Cs': cash, cars and cell-phones. Ultimately, should they formalise their relationship 'traditionally', they pay larger sums of bridewealth to the woman's family. In all cases, sex creates social identities and embeds persons in dense social networks of duties, expectations and obligations that are all held to be creative of the true (African) person (Nguni/Zulu: *umuntu*; Sotho/Tswana: *motho*).

These concepts are fundamentally the same as those that inform the work of traditional healers whose 'indigenous knowledge system'²⁹ are shared by all types of traditional healers, that is, the *isangoma* who heals through possession of spirits that enable him/her to dream and to perceive illnesses in clients, and the *inyanga* (SiSwati/isiZulu) or *dingaka* (SePedi) who is not possessed by spirits but utilises knowledge of the indigenous pharmacopœia in healing with herbs. Both types of healers preserve African traditional philosophies and medical knowledge and elaborate on them.³⁰ The South African indigenous healing system with which I am most

²⁸ Interview: Makhosi Vikizitha, West Central Jabavu; 6 March 2002.

²⁹ Thornton 2002.

³⁰ Ingstad 1990; Green 1999, 1996a, 1996b, 1994.

familiar is the widespread *ndzau* cult of the lowveld and the urban Johannesburg/Pretoria/Soweto area in the highveld.³¹

In synoptic form, the work of the traditional healer in the South African lowveld generally involves manipulation of four co-ordinated substances of the body. These are the **spirit** (SePedi: *mmoya*, Zulu/Swazi: *umoya*), the **body** itself (SePedi: *mmele*, SiSwati: *umtimba*, isiZulu: *umzimba*), the **blood** (SePedi: *madi*, SiSwati: *ingati*, isiZulu: *igazi*), and **aura** (SePedi: *seriti*, SiSwati *sitfuntzi*, isiZulu *isithunzi*, also translated as ‘shadow’, ‘moral weight’, ‘influence’, or ‘prestige’³²). These interact in ways that are similar to the sexual system of flows that I have outlined above. This is represented in Figure 10.7, as the sangoma’s model of the body.

A Sangoma's model of the body		
	Enduring	Transient
Substance	Blood (<i>madzi/igazi</i>)	Body (<i>mzimba/mmele</i>)
Non-substance	"Spirit" (<i>moya</i>)	"Shadow" (<i>seriti/isithunzi</i>)
	Fluid	Presence

Figure 10.7. The Diviner's (*Sangoma*'s) Model of the Body

The body (*umzimba*) itself consists of ‘flesh’ (*inyama*) and is the transient locus of the other substances that can be thought of as flowing through the body while, at the same time, constituting it. Blood and spirit are both enduring substances that survive the death of the transient body in which they reside. Spirit, *umoya* (also meaning ‘air’, ‘wind’, ‘breath’)—a non-material substance or essence—comes from the ancestors (*amadlozi*) and passes on to the succeeding generations through birth, growth of children and their own subsequent procreation. Blood passes in the same way, but unlike spirit it only flows through direct lines of (biological) procreation. Spirit, especially the ancestors, also follow the lines of blood, but

³¹ This system differs in many ways from the Zulu/Xhosa system and that of the highveld Sotho and Tswana cultures, but there are many similarities as well. The following discussion is based primarily on my knowledge of the lowveld systems. People speaking four main languages practice this healing cult: SiSwati (‘Swazi’), lowveld *SePedi* or *Pulana* (closely related to the highveld northern Sotho), *XiTsonga* (‘Shangaan’) and *isiZulu* (widely spoken in the region as elsewhere in South Africa). I give linguistic equivalents in the three languages that are spoken widely and that are used by healers in the region.

³² Doke, Malcolm, Sikakana & Vilakazi 1990; Doke & Vilakazi 1972.

can be selectively activated through ritual and/or prayer or 'de-activated' by ignoring them until they possibly make their presence felt by demanding attention. Spirits, however, can cross lines and 'flow' across the landscape. They can be detained at specific geographical points where people have met unexpected death—such as in automobile accidents—or in battle. They can thus 'flow' across bloodlines and affect others who may not be directly related to them. Thus, several different spirits of different ethnic/linguistic groups may possess sangomas, those who are possessed by spirits and heal through possession trances. Like the body, which dies, the 'shadow' is a non-material presence or aura that the body projects. It is identified with the smell of the person, by the bodily 'dirt' that is present in the person's clothes and living space, and by the sense of presence, character, or charisma that the person has. Each of these 'substances' is utilised in different ways in healing. The body and blood may be treated with herbs that are drunk or rubbed into small cuts. The shadow and spirit are treated through washing with herbal baths, steaming and sweat baths, and by smoke or foam made from plants that produce froth when infused and stirred. Each must be 'balanced' in the person to ensure health, with excesses of blood or spirit being purged (through enemas, vomiting, or sweating), and with deficits being made up through ritual treatments involving 'calling' of the spirits (*pahla*), sacrifice, or herbal and ritual 'strengthening' treatments. All of these entail an adjustment of flows of substance (material or non-material/unobservable) through and in the body. Health results from a balance of substances both within the body and between others involved with the person's social and sexual network of kin, friends, lovers, and associates.

Like the healing system, the sexual system is similarly conceptualised as balancing flows of substance. Health requires adequate sexual activity that allows the person to absorb the sexual substance of others and, for men especially, to 'drain' excess substance (sperm as 'hot blood') into others. Both women and men acquire the 'shadow' of their partners in this way, and thus augment their own bodies with the valuable substance of others. According to an often-quoted proverb, 'a person is a person through other people'. This applies in particular to the sexual exchanges that create flows of substance among one's lovers since they also create the person. Sexuality and healing, then, are parallel systems of flows that create healthy persons just as they create babies who become persons through continued interaction. Without either sex or 'traditional' healing, traditionalists maintain that the person will sicken and die. Nevertheless, sexual flows must be contained and channelled. If the person is ill, and being treated by a traditional healer, they are generally forbidden to engage in sex. Sexual exchanges and the linkages of one's own shadow and blood with others can interrupt the healing process that attempts to balance and manipulate these flows in order to achieve health. The parallel nature of these systems of flows can be seen from the proscription on sex while being treated or healed. In effect, one can either be healed or have sex, but not both. The practice of both would produce unpredictable results since they are part and parcel of the same bodily systems.

Through every act of sex, then, a person not only expresses desire and receives pleasure, but is also received into the social networks of interdependency and trust that permit the expression of one's own character. The southern African conception of the person as always a creation of other and through other people means that networks of social relations are the matrix out of which people achieve their sense of worth and identity. Sex is also part of this, and sexual networks link not just people, but also generations, and through them, to nature, to the environment, and the cosmos. For the traditional healers, this is symbolised by the ocean, *lwandle*, the limitless water to which all rivers flow, and from which all rivers obtain their source. The flows of sexual substance ultimately link to greater flows, with other people as their channels.

With the coming of the 'New South Africa', the vast majority of South Africans experienced a rapid emergence of freedom. This freedom was often interpreted as freedom to consume the fruits of democracy and modernity as symbols of participation in the new state. With standards of living rising rapidly for black people, new avenues of political and economic participation opened. Among these was sexual freedom. In the New South Africa, Deborah Posel has pointed out, 'Consumption – as an affirmation of life and marker of progress – in turn folds into imaginaries of sexual consumption and sexual freedom.'³³ Sex itself became an object of consumption especially after 1992, but in other respects it has also always been the principal and most highly-valued consumable in South Africa. The rapid extension of social grants from government to mothers of young children, the unemployed, the retired, the disabled, the landless, the homeless, and many other categories has pumped cash into an economy in which sex is one of the objects of consumption. While sexual freedom was once restricted to males,³⁴ the new sense of political and social freedom has also permitted women to express their freedom through sexual 'consumption'. Legislation aimed at empowering women means that more and more women are employed in salaried positions, and many use the cash to attract men and engage in sexual recreations. This also is not new. In a sympathetic and detailed study of the 'sex life of Bantu women' in 1950s Johannesburg, Laura Longmore points to the predominance of 'highly sexed' men in the 'Eastern Native Township' where she conducted her research and remarks that this 'must have a positive effect upon the relatively few women who become equally stimulated' by their interest.³⁵ This leads to women having a 'back door husband', or several, as 'women realise they can support themselves and begin to show a spirit of independence.'

Sex, then, is far more than mere expression of 'desire' and its culmination in pleasure. It is also not primarily focused on fertility or fecundity, although this is a welcome and important aspect. Each sex act is a 'value' that is transacted in complex networks of exchange through any instance of love-making, but also through bridewealth (*lobola/bogadi*), or sex that is exchanged for goods in a non-commercial way as gifts, in prostitution or other forms of transactional sex. Sex creates and sustains networks of friendship, influence, mutual support, trust and love. It also creates networks of jealousy, suspicion, gossip, envy and evil. These overlap and interpenetrate.

The consequences of this are not all bad, but the southern African sexual networks do provide wide open pastures for sexually transmitted pathogens of all kinds. The high rates of rape and sexual violence are probably also supported if not directly caused by these concepts and practices. The rape of Baby Tshepang is an instance of this.

SEXUAL CULTURE AND AIDS

Although sex takes place between bodies that are everywhere fundamentally the same, it does so within a context of meanings that change over time and across different communities of meaning. We have called this the 'culture' of sexuality, but the senses of this use of the term 'culture' are different. The culture of sexuality is largely non-verbal, and though it is shared, it is shared through networks of contact and communication between couples themselves. The discourse of sexuality in South Africa is a 'discourse' of acts rather than of words. It takes place between two people who do not generally discuss their acts with others or with each other. These acts link lovers in large silent concatenation of sexual networks and constitute the

³³ Posel 2003b.

³⁴ Longmore 1959: 22.

³⁵ Longmore 1959: 139.

community of shared sexual links and substance. This in itself is essential to the imagination of community, the so-called *ubuntu* or 'African humanism', but it is never visible as such.

The overt meanings of sexual transactions are also 'public' and therefore 'shared' as other aspect of culture are, but are not publicly shared in the same way that other 'cultural' meanings are. These meanings are specifically 'performed' in the non-verbal discourse of bodies in which pleasure is taken and shared, and in which persons are 'produced'. The production of 'persons' in this cultural discourse of sexual bodies occurs in three ways. *Procreative* sex creates actual physical human beings and the social networks of family ties and kinship. *Recreative* (or recreational) sex re-creates the person through social affirmation, and embeds its participants in wide-spreading cross-linked chains and circuits of exchange. This exchange is conducted through multiple media: objects that represent wealth, status and prestige; practical service such as loans or transport; gifts of money, food or clothes; and intangible values such as trust, love, affection and esteem. Finally, there is the *role-creative* aspect of sex in which we become who we are as (gendered) men and women through sexuality. It is the act through which males become 'men' and females become 'women'. This necessarily takes place within the cultural categories that constitute gender at its deepest and most fundamental level. These three aspects of sexual values—the procreative, the recreative and the role-creative—generate compelling motives to act. These motives lead people to 'link-up' to the wider social-sexual network. As we have seen, this network of exchanges is not just of the moment or even of this world alone: it has cosmological and religious implications and is part of the deep structure of southern African culture over the long term.

While social and political roles make use of this distinction that the discourse of sexuality creates (masculinity and femininity, or 'male' and female'), the culture of sexuality itself must be seen as a 'relatively autonomous domain' of human experience. It constitutes a set of patterns of behaviour that form 'root metaphors' for most other aspects of political and social life while existing itself partly isolated from the broader sets of cultural categories and social practices that constitute the rest of daily life. This makes it especially difficult to study as another 'aspect' of human social behaviour, or as a domain of 'culture', but it remains as a fundamental raw experience of life itself that must be constantly interpreted through cultural frameworks of meaning, and actualised through sexual expression and activity as a part of everyday social life.

Sex, then, has its own cultural dimensions that shape its practice and the values associated with it. While many aspects of actual sexual practices are universally human, preferences and frequencies of acts are not. More importantly, the meaning of sexuality differs. Sexual meanings are central to concepts of self and of the person, and to the values we associate with others. The values we attach to pleasure also differ. Accordingly, where social structures, concepts of the person, and values differ, we may find differences in sexual culture that co-ordinate with these differences. Since some aspects of sexuality are certainly universal, however, we must expect that sexual cultures will differ not absolutely but as a matter of degree and emphasis.

This 'model' of the traditional notions of sex and healing helps us to understand crucial aspects of the cases that we began with: 'Baby Tshelang', 'We are killing our men', and 'Jacob Zuma's shower'. What links these is the underlying notions of flows of sexual substance, on the one hand, and the dual nature of sexual contact as both dangerous ('we are killing our men') or as healing ('baby Tshelang'). It is the flow of sexual substance that is held to 'heal' AIDS in the case of having sex with a virgin since the virgin's 'substance' is pure. The discourse of healing cannot be separated from the discourse of flows because they constitute the condition for the possibility of the other. The women who feared they were killing their men, by contrast, feared that their own pollution through contact with death, still-births, and abortions can kill by virtue

of their 'dirty blood'. Zuma believed that the woman he is alleged to have raped—a young woman who was simultaneously his house-guest, a woman who called him 'father', a long-standing friend of the family, a member of his party, a friend of his daughter, a client, a friend—'required' sex to keep her sane and healthy, according to his 'culture'. Jacob Zuma's shower, while scarcely effective against AIDS seems to have been an act of 'cleansing' and strengthening, and is consistent with the notion of dirt, pollution and contamination that are implicit in flows of sexual substance. The sex in this case was both healing and polluting, decreed by 'culture' yet illegal, both crime and its own punishment.

These concepts are powerful and contribute significantly to South African ideas of sex, its dangers and its healing effects. Since sex is both harmful and healing in the traditional sense, the danger of HIV simply adds another burden of danger to the act but does not change the calculus of 'risk'. Its danger does not cancel the healing effect it is also believed to have. Sex is essential to health, and if this means that it also presents certain new dangers, many appear to believe that the danger is just one more risk they have to take. Jacob Zuma did not reject unprotected sex with his house guest merely because he knew she was HIV positive. He took the risk ... *and* a shower afterwards. The centrality of sex in relationships of all kinds, however, means that it links people in complex networks of sexual relations. As we have seen, these ideas also shape the social terrain through which HIV can spread so efficiently. Understanding these concepts is not going to stop the spread of HIV, of course, but it can help us to formulate more effective and culturally sensitive means of dealing with the epidemic.