

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS AS SPACES OF HEALTH INEQUALITY: THE CHANGING ECONOMIC AND SPATIAL ROOTS OF THE AIDS PANDEMIC, FROM APARTHEID TO NEOLIBERALISM NEOLIBERALISM¹

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Introduction and the argument

Between 1990 and 2005, HIV prevalence rates in South Africa jumped from less than 1% to around 29%. Combining ethnographic, demographic and historical insights, this article addresses the important question posed recently by prominent South Africanist scholars: Was Aids in South Africa 'an epidemic waiting to happen?'² To date, important responses to this question have forefronted the legacy of colonialism and apartheid in order to challenge cultural models that reify an 'African system of sexuality' supposedly characterised by sexual permissiveness (for instance as contained in Caldwell, Caldwell and Quiggin, 1989, for a direct critique see Heald, 1995). In particular, the work of social historians has brought to attention the ways in which racial segregation and male migration fuelled an earlier epidemic of syphilis only partially quelled by the introduction of penicillin in the 1950s; moreover, they note how the forces of urbanisation, industrialisation, and Christianisation have long been argued to have destabilised African family structures (for instance Jochelson, Mthibeli, & Leger, 1991; Horwitz, 2001; Delius & Glaser, 2002; Marks, 2002; Phillips, 2004). These accounts of the social origins of Aids built on earlier groundbreaking work on the political economy of health in South Africa (for instance Andersson & Marks, 1988; Packard, 1989).

But while these political economy approaches destabilise the 'culture' thesis in vital ways, there is a danger that they too may be interpreted as evidence that the scale of the Aids pandemic is almost inevitable—this time not because of culture but colonialism, apartheid and industrialisation. In this article I do not question the inextricable link between South Africa's racial form of capitalism and Aids. I do, however, draw attention to recent changes in South Africa's political economy and geography of sex that can help to explain the severity of the pandemic. This leads us beyond the well-studied institution of male-migrancy which, since the 1940s, has become something of a cliché in explaining sexually transmitted diseases and in framing scholars' understandings of the political economy of sex—albeit with much merit. Instead, the article forefronts a more recent interconnected set of economic, spatial, and demographic trends, namely rising unemployment and social inequalities, dramatically reducing marital rates, and the extensive geographical movement of women as well as men in contemporary South Africa. These social forces are complex and have numerous spatial expressions. But they are manifested perhaps most acutely in the country's burgeoning informal settlements where HIV rates are reported to be almost twice as high as they are in rural and urban areas, attracting surprising little comment (HSRC, 2002, 2005; Pettifor, Rees, Stefenson,

² The title of Shula Marks' (2002) article in a special edition of *African Studies* based on the 'Aids in Context' conference and also a book ('Waiting To Happen') based on the same conference and written by Reid, Walker, & Cornell (2004). The conference, a watershed event in the study of Aids in South Africa, was held at the University of Witwatersrand in April 2001.

Hlongwa-Madikizela, MacPhail, & Vermaak et. al, 2004). The article, in putting forward these arguments, seeks to direct greater attention to the connections between contemporary economic policy and Aids (existing critiques of the adoption of neoliberalism in the post-apartheid period include Padayachee, 1998; Bond, 2000; Marais, 2001). In rethinking the social and spatial roots of Aids the centrality of colonialism and apartheid must not be downplayed. But, by the same token, it is vital to note that post-apartheid economic policy has had an—at best—ambiguous affect on the trajectory of the Aids pandemic: on the one hand, some interventions, including the building of houses and the introduction of a child support grant, may have worked to lessen the scale of the pandemic; but on the other hand, the extreme poverty caused by rises in social inequalities and unemployment may have served to propel the pandemic. Finally, in its conclusion, the article turns to a policy of ‘slum clearance’ espoused most enthusiastically by leaders of the province of KwaZulu-Natal in recent months (discussed elsewhere in this volume). This coercive policy, it suggests, could exacerbate the economic and spatial inequalities through which Aids is embedded.

A few caveats are necessary before approaching such an exploratory discussion. First, the complex interactions between race, class, and geography belie a single political economy of sex. It is important to state up front therefore that in this article I am mainly considering poor South Africans and specifically those classified as ‘African’ under apartheid—the primary occupants of informal settlements on which I focus my attention.³ Second, I consider in greatest detail the spatial movements and livelihoods of women (on related changes in masculinities as a consequence of unemployment and inequalities see Hunter, 2005b). Third, although these arguments evolve out of extensive ethnography in an informal settlement, the article draws mostly from secondary data and is aimed at a broader level of analysis.⁴ Even so, a final caveat must be made—sex and Aids should not be too easily equated. Starting with Packard and Epstein’s (1991) important piece it has long been argued that racist assumptions exaggerate the importance of sex to the

³ Although the term ‘African’ is problematic, without recourse to statistics that use the category it is very difficult to make arguments about social change. That Aids is not an essential African disease but rooted in socio-economic forces—although in more complex ways than has been previously accepted—is the main thrust of this article. It is possible that growing class divisions are making Aids less concentrated in one ‘race’, and much more work needs to be done in this area, but the recent HSRC (2005) study finds infection rates of 13% for ‘Africans’, 1.9% for ‘Coloureds’, 1.6% for ‘Indians’, and 0.5% for ‘Whites’. If this is broadly correct, what requires explaining is not only the historical reasons for this discrepancy but the socio-spatial dynamics that underpin it today. For a particularly important argument linking race, ‘premature death’, and geography at a more general level see Gilmore (2002).

⁴ This article is based on ethnographic research conducted in Mandeni, KwaZulu-Natal, where I lived extensively with a family in Isithebe Informal Settlement between 2000-4, and on secondary and archival research. I have refrained from giving extensive background to the study because of space limitations, but see Hunter (2005a).

spread of Aids and exoticise sexuality in problematic ways (see also Vaughan, 1991 and McClintock, 1995 on racial tropes on African sexuality).⁵ In this vein, Stillwaggon (2006) has recently argued that the prevalence in Africa of malnutrition, parasites, and other infectious diseases—all cofactors of HIV infection—better explains the pandemic than sexual behaviour. One must add in the case of South Africa the continued importance of race, albeit crosscut now by class in new ways, to treatment access (on health inequalities see HST, 2004). While cognisant of these debates and the need for more research in this area, the essay seeks to develop critical perspectives on the changing political economy of sex; this, it argues, is necessary to confront some common misconceptions about the Aids pandemic. Despite popular portrayals of African women as passive, immobile, victims—evoked for example in the recent award winning film *Yesterday* about an HIV positive rural woman—it is clear that most women today are no longer waiting in rural areas to be infected by their migrant partners, the pattern of infection described convincingly in the 1940s for syphilis (for the classic enunciation of this view see Kark, 1949; for a critique of *Yesterday* see Mbali & Hunter, 2004).⁶ If President Mbeki's questioning of sex as a mechanism for the transmission of the disease has to be seen in part as a reaction to longstanding racialised representations of Africans as inherently diseased and promiscuous, it has not yet been challenged by scholarship that adequately explores the social context of sex in the post-apartheid South Africa (on the South African government and Aids see Robins, 2004). This article argues that recognising the shifting intersections and spatiality of race, class, gender and sexuality might go some way towards reconfiguring debates on Aids in South Africa around a more politically enabling agenda—one that conceives of Aids as a symptom of 'structural violence' but does not foreclose sex as a mechanism for the transfer of HIV (for a broader overview of structural violence and health in sub-Saharan Africa see Schoepf, Schoepf, & Millen, 2000).

In considering the contemporary political economy of sex, this article gives particular attention to the connection between economic crisis and the exchange of sex for money or gifts. Women's exchange of sex for money in a variety of locations is intricately associated with gendered economic inequalities; recent ethnographies

⁵ Aids research has been heavily biased towards studying heterosexual sex and, consequently, we know little about the extent to which same-sex relationships are associated with the spread of Aids (for an excellent recent history of same-sex relationships in Zimbabwe see Epprecht, 2004). Moreover, the themes in this article represent only a partial study of heterosexual sex; I do not for instance look at sexual violence (but for a recent piece addressing this from a perspective that gives weight to unemployment and the changing household see Niehaus, 2005).

⁶ Indeed, in addition to the movement of women, to which I point, studies show that in many cases rural based women infect their husbands, and not the other way around. One study of discordant couples (where only one partner is infected) in rural KwaZulu-Natal showed that in 4 out of 10 cases it was actually women and not their partners who were HIV positive (Lurie, Williams, Zuma, Mkaya-Mwamburi, Garnett, & Sweat et. al., 2000).

from the 'Third World' source women's marginalisation in the collapse of formal work and expansion of the informal sector, processes accentuated in many cases by World Bank/IMF sponsored structural adjustment programmes (Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998; Schoepf, Schoepf, & Millen, 2000; Brennan, 2004). Ethnographic research on Aids in South Africa has argued that these sex/money exchanges can fuel multiple-sexual-partners, sometimes across large age gaps (LeClerc-Madlala, 2004; Hunter, 2002; Selikow, Zulu, & Cedras, 2002; for a review of the broader sub-Saharan literature see Luke, 2003). Quantitative data seems to suggest that this may play a part in fuelling Aids: one recent study in South Africa found that nearly four times as many women as men aged 20-24 were HIV positive (23.9% compared to 6%), and that many young women had older partners (HSRC, 2005).⁷ These sex-money exchanges should not be mistaken for 'prostitution'. Rather than short term market exchanges, they can endure over time and stretch over space in important ways. Moreover, they involve exchanges of obligations that can incorporate money, love, sex, and emotion, and can be played out through idioms of men as 'providers' that are rooted in marriage.⁸ Through remittances, they can also foster links between migrants and their rural 'homes'.

Migrant labour restricted Africans from settling in urban areas and forced men into long absences from their rural homes. It also reconfigured the sexual economy. In urban South Africa, some migrant men, separated from their wives, engaged in sexual relationships with a relatively small number of female

⁷ A study by Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Gray, James, & Harlow (2004) in Soweto also found a positive correlation between HIV status and the existence of 'transactional sex' (although the nature of exchange means that they are rarely positioned as simply money/sex exchanges and therefore difficult to capture in quantitative studies). For the argument that the same number of overall partners within concurrent rather than serial relationships leads to a considerably more rapid advance of STIs see Morris & Kretzschmar (1997) and Halperin & Epstein (2004). This may be particularly important in the case of Aids because HIV positive people are most infectious shortly after being infected themselves (as well as at the latter stages of Aids). More generally, I am well aware of arguments that sex has either been always easily tradable in Africa or thrown into exchange relations as a consequence of the forces of modernity. I believe, however, that sex has become material in distinctive new ways over roughly the last three decades. See Hunter (2005a,c) for a further discussion. For an excellent review of the often inappropriate use of 'prostitution' in Africa see Standing (1992).

⁸ I draw inspiration from economic anthropologists' work on 'the Gift' that stems from Marcel Mauss' (1925) famous ethnography of Melanesia of the same title. This literature points to how exchanges of *gifts* produces *obligations* and *relations* between people, a form of ties usually contrasted to the exchange of *depersonalised commodities* (you exchange money for goods in a fruit market but do not consider from whom you bought the fruit, but gift exchange involves reciprocal obligations). For useful discussions on 'The Gift', see Gregory (1982) and Parry & Bloch (1989). For an excellent discussion of gift exchanges and intimacy in Brazil see Rebhun (1999). The nature of these relationships is important: while policy makers tend to see low condom use in narrow terms of 'male power', it is often in affairs between 'boyfriends' and 'girlfriends'--positioned as being about love--where men and women are least likely to use condoms and in the most commodified relationships, prostitution, where condoms are used the most (for example Smith, 2004).

'prostitutes' (Bonner, 1990; Walker, 1990). These kinds of relationships helped to fuel the syphilis epidemic that peaked in the first half of the century. During the course of the 20th century, however, several major shifts took place that reconfigured connections between wage labour, the rural household, and the sexual economy (I look elsewhere at urban areas, see Hunter 2005a). First, the economic situation of rural South Africa deteriorated and the rural economy moved from subsidising low wages to becoming dependent on urban areas and wage labour (Wolpe, 1972). Men became the providers of rural households. But a second change was a dramatic rise in unemployment from the mid-1970s that undermined the ability of men to act as reliable providers (on the weakening of the marital bond see Niehaus, 1994). One noted consequence for the sexual economy was the redistribution of the wages of male migrants still in employment, now an elite, through liaisons with women based in rural areas (Spiegel 1981). But it is to the greater movement of women, especially to informal settlements, that I give attention; in these spaces some women find access to employment and yet the sexual economy can play an important role in everyday subsistence. Instead of a geography characterised by circular male migration and the building of a rural home, therefore, I give consideration to how many rural born women today are engaged in circular movements to informal settlements, spaces dominated by densely packed *imijondolo* (a word that is translated into English differently depending on the type and quality of the housing, for instance as 'shacks' when the building is made principally from paper, wood, mud, stones, and corrugated steel or—at the other end of the spectrum—'cottages' when they are made principally from concrete blocks and are rented).

Informal settlements have long been part of South Africa's divided landscape but they are given attention because of the way they capture important recent economic and demographic changes. These areas have very high HIV prevalence rates (the proportion of people who are HIV positive) and, furthermore, new data on HIV incidence (the rate of new infections) finds that a disproportionate amount of HIV infection takes place within these spaces (HSRC, 2005). Researchers estimate annual incidence rates in urban informal areas of 7% as compared to 1.8% in urban formal areas, 2.7% in rural formal areas, and 2.7% in rural informal areas.⁹ This recent study, as well as an earlier one from the same institution (HSRC, 2002), also found the highest reported rates of sexual partners in urban informal areas. Of course, sex can only partly explain such large geographical variations in HIV prevalence; higher infection rates in informal settlements compared to richer areas are in part a consequence of inadequate water, nutrition, and sanitation and the general poor state of health in the former. Yet without considering the political

⁹ Although the accuracy of the test used to measure HIV incidence has been recently disputed. See http://www.unaids.org/en/HIV_data/Epidemiology/default.asp. Thanks to Hein Marais for this reference.

economy of sex it is difficult to explain why, for instance, HIV rates are much higher in informal settlements than in rural areas, both extremely marginalised spaces. Certainly, very few residents in my research site, Isithebe informal settlement, have any doubt that the dependence of a newer generation of single migrant women on men is a major factor driving the Aids pandemic—indeed, in some rural parts of KwaZulu-Natal Isithebe is known as a place where people come to find work and a place from where they return to die.¹⁰ The rest of the paper considers in more detail these themes.

Beyond the male migrant: Towards a new political economy and geography of sex

The archetypal infection route for syphilis in the 1940s, outlined brilliantly by Sydney Kark, was the male miner who became infected through an urban prostitute and returned to pass on the disease to his rural wife. I relay below very briefly the case of Fikile (a pseudonym) that captures a quite different political economy of sex outlined in this paper. Fikile is 26 years old and grew up in Melmoth, in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. She has two children from two different men. One of these children has now died while the other stays with her grandmother in her rural home. Throughout the 20th century a growing number of women gave birth out of wedlock. But Fikile, like most young women today, has a very low prospect of marrying the biological father of a child. Fikile has not therefore moved into a husband's *umuzi* (homestead), as most women of her parents' generation would have done. Instead, Fikile left the Melmoth area in April 2003. Like many rural women, an informal settlement is the first point of entry into an urban area; in her case she moved to Isithebe Informal Settlement that surrounds a large industrial park on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Now, she says that she has two boyfriends in Isithebe who both give her money and are working. Her main boyfriend/partner supports her with food and money, some of which she sends home. She is thus reversing the longstanding pattern of men acting as 'providers' for rural households. The other, an *umakhwapeni* (secret lover, literally 'under the armpit'), gives her 50 or 100 Rands irregularly. Her main boyfriend does not want to use condoms and she says that she trusts him but she uses condoms with the other. Typical of the way that sexual relationships can be stretched from rural to urban areas by women's as well as men's movement, Fikile also sleeps with a boyfriend from home and doesn't use condoms in part because he claims to be her '*indoda yami ngempela ngempela*' (my man, for real, for real) although he is not working and can't support her. She does washing and ironing one day a week, earning R50 (\$8). Under apartheid, many women moved to

¹⁰ Suggestive of the greater risk attached to women's migrancy, one of the few studies on women migrants to urban areas found a positive correlation between migrancy and HIV status (Zuma, Gouws, Williams, & Lurie, 2003).

towns and survived through the informal sector and sometimes the sexual economy; but today what is noteworthy is the sheer scale of women’s movement, the absence of marriage as a rural alternative, and the very poor opportunities for income generation in the informal sector.

Table 1 draws out in a somewhat crude fashion distinctions between social dynamics that can fuel Aids and those that fuelled STIs in the 1940s/1950s.

Social Context	1940s/1950s	Today
Economic	A heavy demand for the labour of African men, some demand for the labour of African women. Very low wages.	Chronic unemployment, especially among Africans. Rising class divisions.
Household	Marriage is increasingly unstable but still common in rural and urban areas. Rural households are increasingly dependent on male remittances.	Growth in the number of households, many of which are one-person households. Rural areas dependent on state pension and remittances from men and women.
Geography	Men in circular migration patterns, some women moving to urban areas. Many informal settlements ‘removed’ by apartheid planners.	Men and women in multiple migration patterns including circular migration. Growth of informal settlements typified by one roomed <i>imijondolo</i> .
Sexuality	Some migrant men with multiple partners. Some women dependent on men in extra-marital relationships. Pre-marital relationships not, on the whole, characterised by exchanges of sex for money.	Many women dependent on men, sometimes multiple men, outside of marriage. Pre-marital relations typified by sex/ money exchanges.

Table 1: Summary of the changing political economy of sex affecting sexually transmitted diseases.

The following section tentatively sketches out three dimensions to the contemporary political economy of sex, giving attention to significant changes that occurred since roughly the 1970s. At this time, the rise of chronic unemployment created new forms of social marginalisation and these were deepened by market reforms in the latter days of apartheid. Yet the post-apartheid state’s embracing of the market has accentuated, and not diminished, the thrust of these trends, even if there have been some improvements in housing and other aspects of social policy. Post-apartheid

neoliberalism, then, is not the sole cause of what I am seeking to describe, and South Africa has by no means undertaken text book neoliberal policies; yet the term does capture the unwillingness of the state to intervene more directly to redistribute wealth, create employment, and provide basic services. More specifically, I argue that three dimensions of the contemporary political economy of sex are important to understand: 1) rising unemployment and the marginalisation of women; 2) rapidly declining marital rates; 3) the growth in women's movement often in circular migration patterns that pivot around a rural 'home'.

1. Unemployment, new social inequalities and the marginalisation of poor women

The demise of rural areas in the 20th century undermined African women's longstanding role as agricultural producers. South Africa's racial capitalism left rural areas, and wives, dependent on migrating men, at the same time leaving most African men dependent on the white-dominated urban economy. But a very strong force shaping the structure of poverty in contemporary South Africa was the economic crisis rooted in the mid-1970s that heralded the end of several decades of rapid growth. From this point, positive per capita growth drifted into negative growth and unemployment increased rapidly. The first casualties of economic crisis were African men; women continued a recent trend of moving into paid employment. A new class of men who had never been formally employed came into existence. At the same time, migrant men who were lucky enough to hold secure work became a rural elite as they benefited from unionisation and the stabilisation of mining employment through the 1970s (Spiegel, 1981; Sharp, 1994).

Many argue that market-led economic policy in the post-apartheid period have accentuated social inequalities. A recent UNDP (2003) concluded that 'Income distribution remains highly unequal and has deteriorated in recent years'.¹¹ Seemingly shell-shocked by the perceived power of 'globalisation', the government retreated from an interventionist economic and social strategy to one that stressed growth through the market. Rapid trade liberalisation, one element of this broadly neoliberal program, dramatically increased wage competition and placed sectors such as clothing under great pressure, helping to nudge unemployment up to over 40% (Nattrass, 2003; Kenney & Webster, 1998). As the formal economy experiences jobless growth in the 1990s, women joined men in the ranks of the unemployed. Between 1995 and 1999 the number of economically active women (searching for or securing informal or formal work within the labour market) increased by 2 millions, twice the increase in the female population of working age (Casale & Posel, 2002). It was no longer an increased demand for labour that was pulling women into the labour market; their entry therefore mostly translated into poorly remunerated and

¹¹ The Gini-coefficient rose from 0.596 in 1995 to 0.635 in 2001. p. xvi. Terreblanche (2002) too argues that social inequalities increased from the 1970s and were accentuated in the post-apartheid period.

highly unstable informal work. Consequently, women's median income fell sharply in the post-apartheid period (Casale, 2004). In my research site, Isithebe, a massive gender gap in earnings arose; some men in well-paid union jobs could earn ten times the wage of women working mostly in clothing factories (Hunter, 2002). Finally, the Aids pandemic itself has further accentuated social inequalities, including by pushing care responsibilities onto the poorest South Africans (Marais, 2005).

But has post-apartheid social spending reversed these negative trends? As the government is quick to point out, the state has substantially increased the value of the pension and introduced a child support grant that now provides support for children up to the age of 14. In many cases, the state pension in particular now serves as a vital, if inadequate, replacement for the income of a male 'breadwinner', continuing a trend that was already in evidence before 1994.¹² Some houses have been build, a matter I discuss further in the conclusion. But seen against the collapse of formal employment in the last three decades these interventions must surely be seen as inadequate. Moreover, the political economy of sex is about more than simply tracing women's increasing poverty; as I show sexuality works through and is moulded by the changing structure of households and different patterns of movement.

2. An unprecedented decline in marriage

The system of male migrant labour, rooted in colonialism and apartheid, rested on the wives of migrants remaining in increasingly impoverished rural areas. This has now changed fundamentally as a consequence of a dramatic recent decline in marital rates. The transformation, however, has gone largely unnoticed, including in the Aids literature. In part this is a consequence of a lack of reliable statistics. But it also reflects the broad brush strokes with which African marriage has been painted. Going back to the 1930s a number of remarkable ethnographies noted the negative effects of 'cultural contact' on the African family (Krige, 1934; Hellman, 1948; Longmore, 1959). Brilliant in their detail, and undoubtedly capturing a sense of change, they fed perceptions that African families were in slow but steady decline. Yet more recently, scholars have questioned teleological narratives of 'family breakdown' (Moore and Vaughan, 1994; Ferguson, 1999; Thomas, 2003; Hunter, 2005a). Certainly, data collected in urban and rural areas suggested the continued centrality of the institution of marriage as late as the early 1980s (Mayer, 1980; De Haas, 1984; Ardington, 1988). And as Figure 1 demonstrates, in South Africa as a whole, marital rates appear to have fallen only from the 1960s--despite numerous

¹² Pensions were raised in Feb. 2006 to R820 a month (\$130). Their importance to rural homes, even at much lower rate, was noted by Ardington & Lund (1995). Child support grant is currently R 190 (\$30) a month. Both are vital to survival in rural areas, especially for women and, indeed, for the continued support of the ANC among the poor.

accounts of a 'family breakdown' prior to this period. Recognising that there was no straightforward causal link between apartheid and family breakdown focuses our attention, instead, on the seismic changes heralded by the deterioration of formal employment. What is significant about the present young generation is that they are experiencing a simultaneous collapse of agrarian and wage livelihoods with very important consequences for marriage, household formation and sexuality.

Many ethnographic studies today reveal extremely low marital rates among Africans, especially from the 1980s.¹³ Statistics on African marriage are more difficult to interpret: African marriage is a process and not an event, systems of civil and customary marriage co-existed (with different regional administrations), and apartheid statistics are notoriously unreliable. Nevertheless, census data support the claim that there has been a quite dramatic decline over the last four decades.¹⁴ The factors behind this decline are complex; they include (until recently) women's increased work prospects throughout the 20th century, and thus their growing economic independence from men. But particularly from the mid-1970s, when unemployment rose sharply, men's inability to secure *ilobolo* (bridewealth) or act as dependable 'providers' became additional reasons for reduced marriage.

¹³ See Denis and Ntsimane (2004) and Hosegood and Preston-Whyte (2003). Family trees taken in rural Mandeni, and many interviews, suggest rapidly declining marriage especially from the 1980s, see Hunter (2005a).

¹⁴ The simplest way to track changes to marriage would be to scrutinise marital *rates*. But such figures were collected only for Whites, Indians and Coloured groups, leaving marital *status*, available from population census data, as the most reliable proxy when considering African marriage. For a discussion of South African data regarding marriage see Budlender, Chobokoane, & Simelane (2004). The above figures include civil and customary marriages.

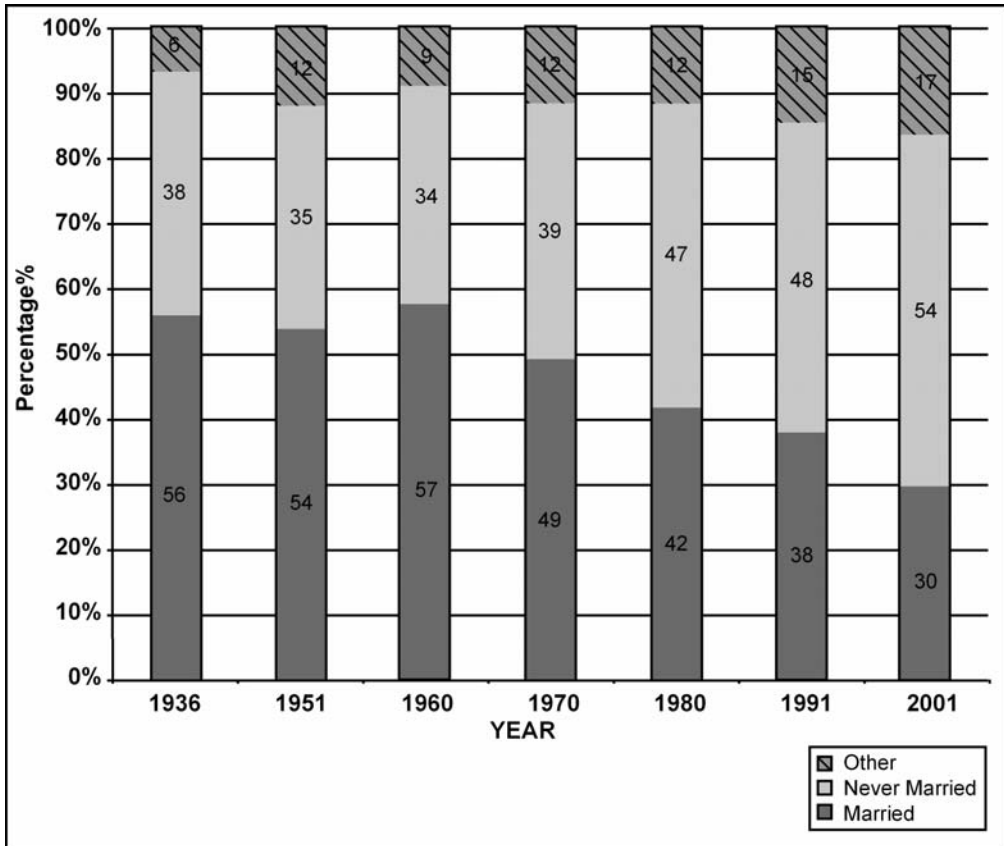


Figure 1: Marital Status for Africans over 15 years of age, 1936-2001
 Source: various census statistics. For more details see Hunter (2005a).

It is important to consider interconnections between unemployment and low marital rates, especially among the young. Seekings and Nattress's (2002) analysis of income stratification, while excluding state benefits, captures the growing gap between an increasingly non-racial middle-class and a mostly African underclass. If adjusted by age, however, the figures seem even more alarming. Under apartheid there were firm racial ceilings that stifled the growth of an African middle-class. African men typically depended on core working-class jobs, for example factory or mining work. Young people today, however, are not, on the whole, entering these classes but are either becoming part of a marginal class or, if they secure good education, an emerging upper-class. Today, young South Africans can live side by side but in ways that belie the optimistic rhetoric of the 'new South Africa': the poor can be crammed into informal settlements that might be located adjacent to posh suburbs in

which the nouveau rich enjoy the consumer trappings that characterise post-apartheid success. The first two columns of the following table are taken from Seekings and Natrass (2002), the latter two are added by the author to illustrate the connections between class structure and household formation. I give attention to the declining social position of African men whose income was central to ‘building a home’ – a powerful Zulu metaphor (*ukwakha umuzi*) that captures the processual nature of courting and marriage. What is clear today is that most young African men and women find it difficult to establish a marital home with any degree of geographical and economical stability.

Class	% of all households	% of all income	Young African men under apartheid	Young African men post-apartheid
Upperclass	12	45	None	Some
Semi-professional, intermediate core working class, petty traders	48	45	Most	Some
Marginal working class, underclass and others (including the unemployed)	40	10	Some	Most

Table 2: Percentage of household income by upper, intermediate, and marginal classes. Source: Seekings and Natrass (2002)

3. Women’s increased movement: from migrating men to moving women?

Male migrant labour is so dominant an institution in South Africa that it overwhelms almost all discussions surrounding migration. Yet for over a century Southern African women have moved to towns, informal settlements, and white owned farms (Bonner, 1990; Walker, 1990). Brutal spatial interventions by the apartheid state, especially ‘forced removals’ and ‘rural industrialisation’, fostered a complex set of gendered migration patterns (Platzky & Walker, 1985). The ending of influx controls in 1986 and the continued decline of rural production have also been noted as driving women’s greater movement today. But I want to suggest that these trends interact with a relatively new set of dynamics: the reorganisation of rural households into more geographically flexible institutions with an expectation that women as well as men will migrate in circular patterns to urban/informal areas. The extent of these new patterns of movement has not been captured by national statistics (although represented for some time in micro-level accounts by

anthropologists (Spiegel, 1995; James, 1999)) in part because of a male bias in migration data, outlined below.

The most common source of data on women's migration comes from census or household surveys. Together these studies show a rise in women's migration from the seventies but indicate that men still migrate more than women (see Posel & Casale, 2003 and Kok, 2003). The limitation of this data is that it defines migration as 'absence' from a home (household surveys) or as a long distance/long term changes in residence (census data). In contrast, data collected by the Africa Centre for Population and Health Studies in rural KwaZulu-Natal, and drawn upon here, appears to show that women move more than men.¹⁵ The Africa Centre visits each household in a geographical area that it calls the Demographic Surveillance Areas (DSA) every four months and counts migration as a change of residence for longer than 3 months. Within the DSA's roughly 90, 000 population, the Africa Centre is therefore able to capture shorter term 'movement' to and from a place, a pattern more followed by women, especially those who leave children in rural areas. Data shows that, at the peak age--when men and women are in their early 20s--roughly 6 out of 10 women and 4 ½ out of 10 men changed residency or 'moved'. We can see immediately that the emphasis on 'movement' rather than 'migration' forces us to challenge quite radically the way that we think about the gendered nature of migration/movement. Longstanding methods of measuring migration therefore tend to capture very well the movement of men for most of a year into an urban area; they describe less well, however, women's more frequent movements backwards and forwards from rural areas.

Informal settlements, the informal economy, and the sexual economy

The term 'informal settlement', rooted in the language of planners, can serve to homogenise what is a diverse spatial landscape. There are many types of informal settlements in contemporary South Africa, from squatter camps in urban areas to settlements on former 'tribal' land. The growth of informal settlements in large towns is not always driven by in-migration from rural areas--a theme given primacy here--but can result from population movements *within* urban areas, for instance when residents move from overcrowded townships or peri-urban farms (on the variety in informal settlements across national and local geographies see Harrison, 1992; Crankshaw, 1993; Hindson & McCarthy, 1994). At the same time, the recent aggregate growth in informal settlements does capture many of the social

¹⁵ I would like to acknowledge the extent that this section draws from my access to the Africa Centre's data and my interaction with Carol Camlin, Caterina Hill, Kobus Herbst, Vicky Hosegood, & Thembeke Mngomezulu. On the construction of the study see Africa Centre Population Studies Group (2003) and Hosegood and Timeaus (2005). Detailed exploration of this data, and the relationship between migration and HIV, will be published in due course.

dynamics that have been neglected in Aids research and are given attention in this essay--women's greater movement, the rise of single person households, the reduction in marital rates, and the dependence of many women on informal sexual exchanges. The most common housing type in informal settlements are *imijondolo* (as stated commonly translated into 'shacks'). These structures are also widespread in formal townships, where they are sometimes called 'backyard shacks'. Rooted in the uneven provision of formal housing for Africans under colonialism and apartheid, informal settlements mushroomed from the mid-1980s following the relaxation of influx controls (that sought to restrict Africans from entering towns) and rising unemployment (see for example Harrison, 1992; Hindson & McCarthy, 1994). But they are not only located in large towns. In fact, the population of Durban, the largest urban areas in the KwaZulu-Natal province, is currently increasing by only 2%, no faster than the population growth of the country as a whole (South African Cities Network, 2004). Many informal settlements, such as the one referred to below, are growing on the outskirts of smaller towns and women, often wishing to preserve strong links with rural areas where a child may be based, can have a strong preference for shorter patterns of movement. A second point I want to stress is that there is nothing inherent about an informal settlement that places women at risk of HIV infection. Since the beginning of the 20th century informal settlements have long been known as spaces of poverty and sex exchanges but also as places that allowed women a certain independence (for instance Bonner, 1990). Researching in the 1930s, Ellen Hellman (1948) noted that the many women who brewed beer (a common informal activity undertaken by women at the time) could earn more money than men working in the manufacturing industry. But today large conglomerates have a stranglehold over beer and other consumer items and this can undermine many informal opportunities; what's more the sheer number of women eking a living in the informal sector drives down earnings opportunities (see Rogerson, 1997).

During the democratic transition, the ANC heralded the provision of housing, perhaps more than any other policy, as having the ability to jump start radical economic and social redistribution. But the state took twice as long (ten and not five years) to meet its first target of building one million new houses. Some scholars blame shortcomings in housing policy on the weakness of the chosen mechanism for delivery, namely a market-driven one off capital subsidy system (see Huchzermeyer, 2004). But Hempson and O'Donovan (2005) have argued that the ANC's failures around housing are also partly due to the fact that the government was dealing with a moving target--despite the building of houses an increase in the overall number of households kept the backlog long. Evidence of the proliferation of smaller, single, households is strong: from 1995 - 2002 average household size reduced from 4.3 to 3.8, driven by a rising share of single households from 12.6% to 21% of all households (Pirouz, 2004). According to government figures, an average of 269 new shacks a day were built between 1996 and 2003, resulting in the presence

of 2.14 million shacks in 2003 (Mail & Guardian, 2005). Informal settlements today therefore are not only testimony to high unemployment rates and an inadequate government housing strategy but to significant demographic trends, namely the increase of smaller households not based around a marital bond.

In my research area, Isithebe Informal Settlement, on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, the 'tribal' land at the heart of Mandeni has been transformed into a large informal settlement. The apartheid state's establishment in the area of Isithebe Industrial Park in 1971 initiated this change. But since the 1990s the informal settlement continued to mushroom despite a decline in formal work in the area from around 23 000 to 15 000 between 1990 and 2005. Put simply many people who migrated to Isithebe in the 1990s did not find work (see Hunter, 2005a). When I asked women and men why they came to an area in which it is difficult to find formal employment, I was told that the prospect for informal or formal work is still better than it is in rural areas. Women depend on a myriad of informal sector activities, from selling *dagga* (marijuana) to petty trading. But the sexual economy is also an increasingly important mechanism for the redistribution of formal and informal earnings. I have been told on a number of occasions that women are well aware that they will have to depend on men when they arrive in Isithebe but that this does not necessarily deter them – with perhaps a child to support in a rural area there are few alternative forms of survival. The need to find a place to stay can also lead newer migrants to depend on men. Most women who arrive in Isithebe stay at first with elder sisters, other relatives, or friends. Living in a small one roomed *umjondolo* themselves, these earlier migrants – the most likely to be in formal employment – have told me that they often discourage relatives from staying with them for very long, an action that can force women to find alternative means of accommodation. Although some women can find work when staying in informal settlements, and many men themselves are unemployed or in poorly paid work, many women pushed out of rural areas in the 1990s are unable to find work and can be forced into dependent relationships on men.

Fikile's case shows quite clearly the ways in which migrant women can maintain strong links with their rural homes and engage in relationships with multiple partners often for money. Yet ethnographic data from Isithebe Informal Settlement suggests that informal settlements are not places of inherent HIV risk. Women with reasonably well paid work can sometimes secure housing independent of men and enter relationships on their own terms. New women migrants can look up to them as role models, seeing independent women as successfully challenging patriarchal models of 'building a home'. Moreover, not all men are able to take part in the sexual economy. Many men are desperately poor and complain bitterly about richer men who are able to secure multiple girlfriends; in Isithebe, typically men with disposable income are those who still work in unionised factories or have invested redundancy payments in lucrative 'male' informal activities such as

running taxis. It is important, however, to distinguish the sex/money exchanges described here from 'prostitution'—an activity that most residents say is rare in Isithebe. These sexual networks, while widening women's ability to make claims on resources, are not simply instrumental and have a complex cultural dimension: gifts are often enacted in terms of men's 'provider' role, claims can be made through evoking 'love', and participants frequently discuss sexual pleasure and physical attraction. In addition to sex, women provide men with companionships and the 'comforts of home' (White, 1990). It is frequent to hear stories of women having material relationships—'one for money, one for food, and one for clothes'—but also common to hear about love letters and signs of affection. A final important point to recognise is that these sexual networks operate alongside—and not in opposition to—social networks based on kinship, friendship groups, churches, and neighbors.

In many cases therefore sex exchanges do not cause family breakdown, a fact that questions the very long association between 'prostitution' and 'social degeneration'. On the contrary, remittances from sexual networks can help to foster kinship ties. There is an expectation that money will be given by migrating women to a rural home, especially if a woman's child is looked after by other family members.¹⁶ Earlier scholarship showed how men's wages were distributed through sexual networks in rural Lesotho (Spiegel, 1981) and how rigid conjugal bonds in South Africa were being superseded by more flexible *sibling* bonds characterised by reciprocity (Niehaus, 1994). What is different today is the ways in which women's migration further reflects and affects this changing household structure. In a situation where marital bonds are no longer common, rural women tend to pivot multiple movements around their rural home (sometimes where a child is left), a fairly flexible arrangement allowing for women's frequent movement, the transfer of resources through sexual liaisons, and the redistribution of state benefits, especially pensions, often through the presence of a rural grandparent, usually a *gogo* (granny). As unemployment bites deeper into society, sexual exchanges and the household have been interwoven in new ways. Indeed, without sexual exchanges, many of the women-headed *imijondolo* (roughly shack) households would simply not exist.

¹⁶ The Agincourt Demographic Surveillance System based in the North East of South Africa found extremely strong links between migrants and their rural homes—60% of temporary migrants communicating with the rural home in the two weeks prior to one study (Collinson, Tollman, Kahn, & Clark, 2003).



Housing can help to grant single women some form of economic independence. But the state's housing scheme has been criticised for granting poor quality housing, falling behind targets, and building housing away from town centers where economic activity takes place (photo: housing project, Stanger; source: author)

Discussion and conclusion

In April 2006, Mike Mabuyakhulu, KwaZulu-Natal's Minister of Local Government, Traditional Affairs, and Housing, boldly declared that he would clear all of the province's 'slums' by 2010, the year in which South Africa will host the World Cup soccer tournament. In doing so, the minister pitted himself directly against *Abahlali baseMjondolo* - the shack dwellers movement - that had risen in Durban to challenge the social conditions of shack dwellers and the slow pace of service delivery (see Patel & Pithouse, 2005 and other contributions to this volume). Mabuyakhulu, like the government as a whole, fails to recognise the economic and demographic forces driving the growth of informal settlements. From 1996-2003 the number of informal dwellings rose by 688 000 in South Africa, despite the existence of house building projects funded by the state (Mail & Guardian, 2005). A series of social forces--growing poverty and inequality, reductions in household size, the greater movement of women, the decline in marital rates, and the shortage of housing--are

geographically manifested in informal settlements. Informal settlements express great variety in terms of rates of employment, gender breakdown, residents' places of origin, and types of building structure. But they tend to be occupied by the poorest South Africans and, according to available statistics, HIV prevalence rates tend to be at their highest in these spaces. In South Africa, they are testimony to the failure of economic growth to trickle down to the poor and to a persistent set of economic and spatial dynamics that can help to fuel Aids.

This article has pointed to dramatic demographic as well as economic changes over the last generation, especially reduced rates of marriage. It is important to reemphasise, however, that it is not simply low levels of marriage in these or other areas that creates a risk of HIV infection but the dependence of very poor single women on men and on an informal sector that offers very limited means of livelihood. Indeed, single, economically independent, women may have a certain amount of social protection against HIV. The building of housing by the state has taken place at a slow pace and the houses are of poor quality, largely because of fiscal concerns, but the outcomes of this policy are significant. Single women may, at times, gain disproportionately from housing projects because the only way a single person can apply for housing is if they have dependents, and this tends to favor women. But KwaZulu-Natal's (and other provinces') reluctance to build houses in central urban areas and attempts to remove shacks to the city's outskirts may not only prove impossible to enforce but create new costs and dependencies for women, especially through transport expenses. Critically, the policy is another example of the failure of the state to even conceive of connections between the economy, gender, space, and the Aids pandemic.

In the last decade, scholars have undertaken enormously important work by pointing to the deep social roots of Aids. Yet the projecting forward of old models, typically male-migration, has resulted in researchers overlooking the changing economic, spatial, and demographic landscape upon which the Aids pandemic is unfolding. Social movements too have not given extensive attention to links between economic crisis and Aids. The remarkable success of the Treatment Action Campaign in forcing the state to introduce antiretrovirals has not been matched by a campaign that links housing, employment, and social equality to Aids—one that considers the pandemic as a symptom of 'structural violence' with longstanding but also contemporary roots. Of course, the links between economic policy and Aids are complex. Post-apartheid economic policy has been paradoxical, swinging from orthodox neoliberalism in some respects to a more interventionist agenda that includes housing projects and increases in state benefits. I have touched on the importance of housing but will add the importance of state benefits, particularly the child support grant and the pension. They are not an alternative to policies that create employment but they are vital to lifting women out of the sexual economy. These connections and others must be teased out and emphasised if prevention

campaigns are to resonate with the social conditions in which many South Africans live. Although Aids is sourced in colonialism and apartheid, the scale of the impact of South Africa's Aids pandemic was not inevitable; arguably its trajectory has been worsened by continued social and geographical divisions in the post-apartheid period.

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