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Along the stereotyping road: nineteenth and early twentieth centuries narratives of ukuhlonipha

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Abstract: In this paper, I ask how colonial and academic writings from the 19th and early 20th centuries are responsible for the gender-stereotyping and linguistic-stereotyping of ukuhlonipha, an avoidance-based custom of respect traditionally applied to in-laws among Nguni-speaking communities in Southern Africa. I engage in the historical recovery process by suggesting that the knowledge circulation from colonial-era South Africa to philological and anthropological theories of imperial-era Europe is evidence of a knowledge erasure about the custom of ukuhlonipha.

Keywords: ukuhlonipha; isihlonipho; historical sociolinguistics; erasure; historical recovery

1 Introduction

> One day […] the missionary, whose name was Green, happened to say that the Cape gooseberries which the natives brought for sale were too green to use. Instantly the native women corrected her, declaring that she should express herself in a roundabout way and say the gooseberries were not ripe, for Green was her husband's name, and she should never mention it (Kidd 1904: 237).

Not mentioning one's husband's surname[1] is one of the many rules included in the customs of ukuhlonipha[2] – also referred to as *isihlonipho* – among Nguni-language and Sotho-language communities of South Africa, Eswatini and Lesotho. Ukuhlonipha are a set of avoidance-based customs of respect applied to in-laws and, to some

1 In Nguni language-speaking societies, the surname can be regarded as a family name based on patrilineality. It is only one of the names linking back to ancestors, as clan names and eventually praise names, also denote a shared ancestor (Neethling 2005; Raum 1973). In this context, the surname could be refered to as a ligneage name.

2 From Xhosa *(uku)hlonipha* "to give respect" (Tshabe and Shoba 2021 [2006]: 775).

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extent, to chiefs or kings. Ukuhlonipha traditionally involves context-dependent strategies of linguistic avoidance (e.g., father-in-law or mother-in-law names), physical avoidance (e.g., spouses and their in-laws), spatial avoidance (e.g., cattle pen) and material avoidance (e.g., tools) for both women and men (Mncube 1949; Raum 1973; Soga 1931). Nowadays, the custom is not observed to the same extent but still has significance in modern societies (Irvine and Gunner 2018).

In this paper, I intend to illustrate the deep historical roots surrounding the conceptualisation of ukuhlonipha, as suggested by Irvine and Gal (2000), by questioning the 19th and early 20th centuries published accounts of the custom in colonial-era South Africa and imperial-era Europe, written in English. I argue that a fair amount of descriptions of ukuhlonipha have been produced by colonial agents in the South African context, yet only a handful of detailed accounts made it to nineteenth century philological and anthropological theories in Europe. The knowledge circulation of ukuhlonipha across continents is evidence of a dichotomy of ethnographic interests, between the necessity to describe readable colonial subjects in the South African context, and the emerging necessity to establish universal knowledge strongly tied to theories of language in the European context (Deumert 2020). Consequently, the custom of ukuhlonipha stands out as a complex web of sociolinguistic and sociopolitical implications reflecting the social and political stakes of colonisation in British-ruled South Africa as well as the intricacies of knowledge as power in far-off imperial-Europe.

Produced for the colonial administration, for the missionary audience or for the general public, I investigated early exogenous published accounts of the custom of ukuhlonipha written in the South African context from the 19th century to the early 20th century. Observing a tendency to describe a linguistic custom of the women, as contemporary research about the custom also tends to focus on, I engaged in the imperial route to question the ways in which knowledge about ukuhlonipha had been circulating from the South African colonial context to the academic theories of imperial Europe.

After providing a brief literature review of ukuhlonipha, I outline the dominant knowledge circulation about the custom in the 19th century. In the next section, I introduce a four-part thematic analysis of missionaries' writings. Firstly, I focus on a sociolinguistic account of ukuhlonipha produced for the administration. Secondly, I explore the accounts of missionaries describing some difficulties they encountered and attributed to the custom of ukuhlonipha. Thirdly, I suggest how dictionaries can illustrate the evolution of conceptualisation of ukuhlonipha. Fourthly I introduce two accounts of ukuhlonipha that contributed to counter the tendency to gender-stereotyping the custom. The last section intends to demonstrate how the feminine conceptualisation of ukuhlonipha nonetheless circulated from the South African context to European academic circles.

2 Ukuhlonipha in the literature

Before the mid-20th century, the knowledge authorities over the custom of ukuhlonipha could be categorised as such: the "from-experience" colonial agents accounts (19th and early 20th centuries), the "for-generalisation purpose" accounts of the Western academics and intellectuals (19th century), and the early 20th century "ethnographic-oriented" accounts of anthropologists and linguists. Around the mid-20th century, a new interest in ukuhlonipha by South African scholars is displayed in Faye's early study of ukuhlonipha and clicks in Zulu (1925), Mncube's (1949) thesis about linguistic ukuhlonipha as applied to Zulu and Xhosa women, or Kunene's exploration of 'hlonepha' among Southern Sotho (1958).

It is interesting to note that the 19th century accounts of ukuhlonipha tended to focus on the custom as applied to Xhosa communities while most of the early 20th century studies focus on ukuhlonipha among Zulu communities. However, in the 1980s, Xhosa communities were at the focus of ukuhlonipha research, with Finlayson's study of 'isihlonipho sabafazi' (1978, 1982, 1984, 2002) and its sociolinguistic exploration by Dowling (1988), or the work of Herbert on the social significance of the custom (1990b) and the sociohistory of its linguistic components (1990a). Interestingly enough, a new turnover can be noticed at the beginning of the 21st century since most of the recent publications about ukuhlonipha account for the custom among Zulu communities (Irvine and Gal 2000; Irvine and Gunner 2018; Luthuli 2007; Neely 2021; Rudwick 2008, 2011, 2013; Rudwick et al. 2006; Rudwick and Shange 2009; Zungu 1997), alongside a handful of work about 'hlonepha' or 'ho hlompho' among Sotho communities (Fandrych 2012; Thetela 2002, 2006, 2013).

Most of the studies of ukuhlonipha produced in the late 20th century and early 21st century observed a custom decay and have foreseen a rapid fall of ukuhlonipha (Dowling 1988; Herbert 1990b; Irvine and Gal 2000). However, it is now clear that ukuhlonipha is still a component of the Nguni-speaking communities, both as a custom still observed in some contexts (Fandrych 2012; Irvine and Gunner 2018; Rudwick 2008, 2011; Rudwick and Shange 2009), either in its traditional understanding in rural context or in its modern understanding in urban settings, but also, as I want to suggest, as a custom slowly turning into a cultural heritage artefact. Therefore, historicising knowledge of ukuhlonipha can contribute to shed light on past understandings of the custom and therefore reflect on contemporary perceptions and questionings of ukuhlonipha, as it still affects contemporary lives, at least by the general scheme of social behaviour governed by respect strategies (Irvine and Gunner 2018).

3 From 'British Kaffraria' to Oxford: a hegemonic knowledge of ukuhlonipha

A thorough survey of ukuhlonipha accounts published in English in the 19th and early 20th centuries established a restricted knowledge circulation based upon the earliest explicit account of the custom. From 1850 onward, dozens of descriptions of ukuhlonipha were published in South Africa, but none had such an influence in European academic circles as John W. Appleyard's in *The Kafir Language* (1850) had.

In 1850, the Wesleyan missionary John Wittle Appleyard[3] was the first to explicitly[4] describe the custom of ukuhlonipha in his grammar *The Kafir Language* (1850). Focusing on describing linguistic features of isiXhosa, Appleyard introduces the custom as one of the characteristics of the extended verba corpurum he observed in the language. In this manner, he introduces the custom as a women-only and linguistic-only "national custom" of the Xhosa. "It may be mentioned as a remarkable fact, that the Kafir *women* have many words peculiar to themselves. This arises from a national custom, called *ukuhlonipa*, which forbids their pronouncing any word, which may happen to contain a sound, similar to one in the names of their nearest male relatives. […]" (Appleyard 1850: 70).

Seemingly brief and not much detailed, this account of ukuhlonipha is nonetheless the first to state that the Xhosa people – or as suggested by Appleyard, the Xhosa women – have a linguistic pattern of avoidance involving names of relatives and being governed by a national custom. Interestingly enough, right before this description, Appleyard describes another linguistic pattern of avoidance that he apparently does not consider as part of the "national custom called *ukuhonipa*".

> There is a difference observable amongst some of the Kafir tribes, in reference to the use of certain words, arising from a kind of superstitious objection which they feel against employing a word, that is similar in sound to the name of one of their former chiefs. Thus, the Amambalu do not use *ilanga*, the general word for *sun*, because their first chief's name was *Ulanga*, but employ *isota* instead. For a similar reason, the Amagqunukwebi substitute *immela* for *isitshetshe*, the general term for *knife*. (Appleyard 1850: 69–70).

3 John Wittle Appleyard was a missionary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. He reached South Africa in 1840 and devoted his life to missionary activities and linguistic description among Xhosa people, where what was then called "Kaffraria". At the time, he wrote an acclaimed grammar of Xhosa, *The Kafir Language* (1850).

4 The first account of the custom of ukuhlonipha – in English or French – has been identified in Ludwig Alberti's *Description physique et historique des Cafres, sur la côte méridionale de l'Afrique*, published in French in 1811, a year after the original was published in Dutch. Ukuhlonipha is not referred to explicitly in this early account.

However, one can be stricken by the similarity between the prohibition of phonetically similar words to the names of family members and the prohibition of phonetically similar words to the names of chiefs or former chiefs. In his grammar, Appleyard had in fact produced two different accounts of a similar custom, the custom of ukuhlonipha, applying both to family members and political figures. Nevertheless, what Appleyard labelled as "ukuhlonipa" was a linguistic behaviour of women, therefore rooting the first written knowledge of the custom in a gendered conceptualisation that would be further reused, as he was an influential figure in imperial 19th century.

From Appleyard (1850) short linguistic definition of ukuhlonipha to European academic circles, knowledge about the custom quickly travelled overseas and appeared from 1863 in the *Lectures on the Science of Language* of Prof. Friedrich Max Müller.[5] In Müller's introductory lecture, the custom of ukuhlonipha is introduced alongside the Tahitian custom of pi'i,[6] to demonstrate how what could initially be labelled as an "accident" or a "fancy peculiarity" of a language could in fact emerge in geographically and linguistically distant languages (Müller 1863: 45). Moreover, while Appleyard did not link the "superstitious objection" to the custom of ukuhlonipha, it should be noted that Müller used both points to support his theory of women's influence on language, stating that if men were bounded by the custom with regards to their chiefs, it was clear evidence of a "mere feminine peculiarity […] [that] extended its influence" (Müller 1863: 48).

Acclaimed professor of Comparative Philology and Comparative Mythology at Taylor Institution in Oxford, Müller's account of ukuhlonipha, privileging a gendered conceptualisation of the custom, quickly became the authority over European academic writings using ukuhlonipha to support their anthropological, philological, historical or linguistic claims.

Overall, as soon as Appleyard's account reached Europe, it became the primary source of most of the academic writings of the 19th century discussing the custom of ukuhlonipha, but only behind the authority of Müller's *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1863). In fact, anthropologists or historians such as Edward B. Tylor (1865),

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5 Friedrich Max Müller was an Orientalist and prominent professor of Comparative Philology and Comparative Mythology at Taylor Institution, Oxford University. He was a member of the Institut de France (Paris) and received the Prix Volney from the Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres in 1862. His *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1862) and *New Lectures on the Science of Language* (1863) were translated to French in 1867 by George Harris and George Perrot.

6 In the 19th century, the Tahitian custom of pi'i or *ma'irira'a i'oa* (Salmon/Marautaaroa 1927), a custom that prevented subjects from using the name of the royal family (king and princes) as well as any word containing similar sounds to the forbidden names (Ahnne 1994), was always referred to as "*te pi*". A fair amount of academic accounts of ukuhlonipha discuss the similarity between the custom of pi'i and the custom of ukuhlonipha (cf. Farrer 1879b; Fiske 1872; Lefèvre 1871; Oppert 1879; Sayce 1875; Werner 1905).

John Fiske (1872) or Andrew Lang (1884) and philologists or linguists such as Archibald H. Sayce (1875) and later on Alice Werner (1905), attributed their knowledge of ukuhlonipha to Müller's description and theorisation of the custom.

Nevertheless, the description of ukuhlonipha in Tylor's *Researches into the early history of mankind and the development of civilization* (1865) suggests that Appleyard or Müller were not the only figures to contribute to create knowledge of the custom in the academic world. Indeed, Tylor's account of ukuhlonipha (1865), while following on Müller's, also introduces *A Zulu-Kafir Dictionary* (1857) from Jacob L. Döhne's, missionary to the Berlin Mission and American Board Mission, as one of his sources. Therefore, were Appleyard's and Müller's depictions of ukuhlonipha the only accounts that circulated? While it surely dominated the construction of knowledge – at least in the academic context – a fair amount of accounts describing ukuhlonipha have been published in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

4 The coloniality of knowledge: ukuhlonipha narratives from South Africa (1811–1915)

Missionaries dominated the 19th century narratives of the custom of ukuhlonipha. Whether on linguistic work such as grammars (Appleyard 1850) and dictionaries (Colenso 1861; Davis 1872; Döhne 1857; Kropf 1899), on personal life accounts (Brigg 1888; Shaw 1860) or on monographs relating the history and folklore of the Southern African people (Fleming 1854; Holden 1866; Leslie 1875; Shooter 1857), or even on papers for and by the administration (Warner 1858), missionaries tremendously contributed to construct knowledge of ukuhlonipha. While each account could be taken separately, it is interesting to note how they – almost – all account for a similar narrative, one that encourages the substitution of the traditional society in favour of a 'civilised' Christian society, and therefore strongly wishes for the traditional customs to disappear (Mills 1995).

To explore the representation of ukuhlonipha under missionaries' pens, I offer a thematic order rather than a chronological order. Given that knowledge of ukuhlonipha does not seem to have circulated much within the colonial context of British-ruled South Africa, it is relevant to reflect on similar missionary narratives that might have been published years from each other, but that nonetheless describe the custom for the same purpose. With this in mind, we will start with one of the earliest accounts of ukuhlonipha, written for the administration by the former Wesleyan missionary John C. Warner, and published in Colonel Maclean's *A Compendium of Kaffir Laws and Customs* (1858). Secondly, we will focus on the abolitionist narratives of ukuhlonipha through the life accounts of the Wesleyan missionaries William Shaw (1860) and Arthur Brigg (1888), and in the monograph of William C. Holden (1866).

Thirdly, we will focus on the accounts of ukuhlonipha in dictionaries published throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially because they are evidence of the evolution of representation with regards to ukuhlonipha and the traditional customs in general. To bring the analysis to a close, we will introduce the early account of Joseph Shooter (1857), chaplain to the British settlers in Durban, along the writings of David Leslie (1875), a knowledgeable hunter close to the Zulu royal family, to illustrate the gender-stereotyping tendency surrounding knowledge of the custom of ukuhlonipha.

4.1 An early echo from the administration

In 1858, an influential colonial work was published by the colonel Maclean: *A Compendium of Kaffir Laws and Customs*. Intended as a guide into "the nature of Kafir law" to the "newly appointed Magistrates" (Maclean 1968 [1858]: 58), Maclean's *Compendium* covers a wide range of sociocultural and sociopolitical accounts of Xhosa society – mostly written by missionaries and local administrators – and embodies the new knowledge system of the colonial society (Price 2008: 147).

Replying to Maclean's letter, John C. Warner, superintendent among the Thembu and former Wesleyan missionary, offers a thorough overview of the laws and customs of the Xhosa. Warner divides his long letter in two categories: "Laws and Customs connected with their Judicial and Social systems", "Laws and Customs connected with their system of Superstition". Aligned with Governor Grey assimilationist project (Schmidt 1996), Warner considers that the traditional Xhosa system relying on chiefs is "the greatest defect of Kafir law" (Warner 1858: 58) and that the customs "are highly injurious, subversive of morality, and entirely inimical to Christianity and civilization" (Warner 1858: 58).

While Warner is strongly embedded in an abolitionist ideology to "maintain the peace and tranquillity of the country" (Warner 1858: 58), his account of ukuhlonipha is nonetheless the first to offer an overview of both the linguistic and non-linguistic rules of the custom.

> By this strange custom, a daughter-in-law is required to "hlonipa" her father-in-law, and all her husband's male relations in the ascending line; that is, to be cut off from all intercourse with them.
> […] She is not allowed to pronounce their names, even mentally; and whenever the emphatic syllable of either of their names occurs in any other word, she must avoid it […] She is not allowed to enjoy their company, nor to be in the same hut with them; nor is she supposed even to look at them. […] The same custom forbids all strange females, or those related only by affinity to the owner of the kraal, from entering the cattle fold, or even from walking on those parts of the village site, where the cattle are accustomed to stand and lie down, and which is called the "inkundhla." […] Females not related by blood to the owner thereof, are also forbidden by this custom to touch the milk sack; and they would rather die of hunger, than pour milk therefrom. […] The daughter-in-law must to a certain extent "hlonipa" her mother-in-law also […] (Warner 1858: 92–93).

Warner considers that ukuhlonipha is a "strange custom" but provides a detailed account of the avoidance behaviour expected of women, both linguistic and physical. He even described how "any *wilful* breaches of this custom" (Warner 1858: 93) were prevented, suggesting that a fear of the *imishologu* (ancestral spirit)[7] ruled ukuhlonipha, it being considered by Warner as a custom included within the superstitious system of the Xhosa. Moreover, Warner briefly described how men were expected to behave with their mother-in-law, not being able to "enjoy her society, or remain in the same hut with her; nor can he pronounce her name. […] (Warner 1858: 93), suggesting that ukuhlonipha was not a women-only custom.

Consequently, it should be noted that Warner's account of the custom, even if embedded in an understanding of the custom contrasting to the author's own Christian beliefs, still displays a rich knowledge of ukuhlonipha. In fact, this early account stands out from two common stereotypes surrounding the custom of ukuhlonipha, the language stereotype and the gender stereotype that have been spreading from the 19th century onwards (Irvine and Gunner 2018). Moreover, Warner's account in Maclean influenced two colonial accounts of ukuhlonipha, that of William Shaw (1860) and William C. Holden (1866) which will now be discussed.

4.2 Ukuhlonipha as a "great hindrance" to Christianity

Following on Warner's cultural abolitionist ideology, some missionary accounts offer an insight into the daily cultural encounter of missionaries and local populations. While Warner did not overly describe the custom with personal comments, still labelling ukuhlonipha a "singular" or "strange custom" (Warner 1858: 92), life accounts and monographs are filled with personal experiences and opinions.

In 1860, William Shaw, father of South African methodism, published his *Story of my Mission in South-Eastern Africa*. Citing Warner's account of ukuhlonipha (1858), Shaw describes the custom to illustrate how behaviours expected from women "occasioned great difficulty" during "assemblies of worship" (Shaw 1860: 425). In 1866, William C. Holden, Wesleyan missionary in Durban and Somerset East, considered that the "strange and absurd custom" of ukuhlonipha was affecting "the probabilities of their improvement" (Holden 1866: 370), meaning the turning to 'civilised' Christian society of Xhosa and Zulu people. In 1880, Archdeacon Waters, from St John's mission among the Mpondo, suggested that his mission had "been

7 By '*imishologu*', it is unclear if missionaries refer to ancestral spirits called '*umshologu*' or '*ishologu*'. However, the notion of fear suggests an evil spirit. '*Umshologu*' refers to an ancestral spirit "that enters a person and brings about the mental disturbance and disorientation that is preliminary to entry into divination" while '*ishologu*' nowadays refers to "any evil spirit left by a deceased man or woman who used to practice witchcraft" (Tshabe and Shoba 2021 [1989]: 179).

troubled by "heathen customs cropping among Christians, as for instance […] 'hlonipa' or women clipping words […] in fear of the 'imishologu' or departed spirits"" (SPG 1880: 172). In 1888, Arthur Brigg, Wesleyan missionary in Wittebergen, Bensonvale, Grahamstown and Somerset East, included ukuhlonipha in the customs that "specially confront us in our missionary work" (Brigg 1888: 51), next to polygamy, circumcision (male initiation) or *intonjane* (female initiation), and *lobola* (bride wealth). Brigg also suggested that traditional leaders could temporarily suspend the custom when "God's word was preached" but that women still uphold ukuhlonipha "for a long time", proving how deeply rooted was the custom in Xhosa society (Brigg 1888: 63).

Demonstrating how ukuhlonipha prevented missionaries to annihilate the traditional customs, these accounts illustrate several issues at stake in the 19th century: the difficulty to supplant Christianity to the traditional system of beliefs organising Xhosa society, the power of the traditional chiefs in the missionary encounter, the hybridity of practises assembling traditional customs and Christianity, the clash of understanding of masculinity and femininity with regards to ukuhlonipha and the relationship of women to the custom.

Shaw's (1860) and Brigg's (1888) accounts illustrate how ukuhlonipha could be temporarily – and temporarily only – put aside during preaching. Indeed, while Shaw demonstrated how ukuhlonipha was deemed unfitting "in places of Christian worship" by means of a "public sentiment" (Shaw 1860: 425), Brigg suggested that it was the chiefs who had the power to suspend the custom during itinerant preaching, but that it was the women that had the ultimate power over the custom, since they were "its firmest upholders" (Brigg 1888: 63). Therefore, these narratives of ukuhlonipha can also illustrate how Xhosa could control the missionary encounter (Price 2008: 58).

In a similar vein, Holden (1866) and Brigg (1888) stated that ukuhlonipha disappeared when Christianity began to strongly influence Xhosa society, Holden suggesting that they "only abandon[ed] it slowly" and that is was "long before they g[a]ve it up altogether" (Holden 1866: 370), Brigg suggesting that "Christians laid it aside entirely" and that it "discontinued" among "many of the heathen" (Brigg 1888: 67).[8] However, Waters' brief mention of ukuhlonipha (1880) implied a more complex pattern. In fact, Waters considered that ukuhlonipha was a custom troubling the mission because it was still practised among Christian converts. In a sense, only Brigg

8 It is interesting to note that this idea of Christianity supplanting traditional customs can also be found in Lancelot E. Threlkeld's *A Key to the Structure of the Aboriginal Language* (1850), in which he suggests the same pattern with regards to the Tahitian custom of pi'i: "The former custom of changing words in the heathen times at Tahiti, has ceased ever since Christianity conquered Idolatry in the Islands" (Threlkeld 1850: 70).

(1888) offered a triumphal narrative – even out of the whole accounts identified. Therefore, it is possible that at the time of Brigg's missionary activities, a 'triumph' of Christianity over ukuhlonipha might have been the reality around missionaries. However, the accounts published after Brigg's, and the continuity of research about ukuhlonipha until nowadays suggest that the custom was never erased from the cultural system of the Nguni-language people, as missionaries hoped for. On the contrary, a strong sense of hybrid identities developed and a "juxtapositioning of Christianity with African traditional practices" (Mokhoathi 2019: 183) emerged out from the colonial encounter, therefore, ensuring a continuity of ukuhlonipha until today (Irvine and Gunner 2018; Rudwick 2013; Rudwick and Shange 2009).

Another point that is to be found in Brigg (1888) and Warner's account (Warner 1858), is the notion of domestic femininity in Christianity, that is challenged by the Xhosa femininity displayed in ukuhlonipha. Indeed, Warner briefly suggested that ukuhlonipha presented "insuperable difficulties […] to the exercise of those kindly offices which Christianity inculcates" (Warner 1858: 92). The importance of those "kindly offices" are also supported by Brigg (1888) when he suggested that ukuhlonipha implied a behaviour opposed to "the polite attentions which young married women amongst ourselves delight to render to their new relations" (Brigg 1888: 62). Moreover, Brigg considered that the role of women in Xhosa society was not appropriate in general, and that men, with Christianity, could rise to their "proper place, as the hard-worker of the family" (Brigg 1888: 67) so that women could "attend to domestic work" (Brigg 1888: 67). Therefore, drawing on from Price's (2008) interpretation of the continuity of the custom of circumcision as a denial of Christian masculinity, I argue that the ways in which missionaries depicted ukuhlonipha – and apparently experienced it – demonstrate that the continuity of ukuhlonipha could have been seen as a denial of Christian femininity and therefore, as a denial of Christianity. Moreover, missionaries were strongly engaged in a moral release process, being convinced that Christianity would bring gender equality to what they saw as an uncivilised way of treating women through traditional customs (Etherington 1995; Mills 1995). Brigg, by unhappily stating that "As on journeys, so at home, the woman is the hard worker" (Brigg 1888: 63), illustrates both of those missionary concerns.

To conclude this part, it should be noted that the patrilineal organisation of Xhosa society could also explain this missionary understanding of ukuhlonipha as only applied to women. Indeed, since ukuhlonipha was mostly applied to in-laws and wives would move to their husband's family, they were subject to ukuhlonipha on a daily-basis, while men were not often in the presence of their in-laws. Moreover, the linguistic aspect of ukuhlonipha only applies to names of a relative for men, while it applies for names of a relative and words containing similar sounds to these names for women, therefore affecting women's language on a daily basis (Finlayson 2002;

Mncube 1949). Thus, missionaries did not seem to have encountered many men behaving according to ukuhlonipha – and if they did, they did not write about it – but women were strongly restricted by ukuhlonipha in most of their encounters with missionaries, as for example when asked their names (Brigg 1888: 63), when asked about the headman of their household (Shaw 1860: 426), when taught the gospel and being unable to repeat some words (Kidd 1904: 238–239), or when asked to stand somewhere suitable for missionaries but inconceivable for them (Brigg 1888: 63; Kidd 1904: 238–239).

4.3 Along the gender-stereotyping road of ukuhlonipha

4.3.1 Bilingual dictionaries as evidence of an evolving understanding of the custom

To ensure preaching of the gospel, acquiring knowledge of local languages was at the centre of the missionary agenda of the 19th century (Gilmour 2006). An important body of accounts of ukuhlonipha are to be found in bilingual dictionaries, in which not only words are explained and translated, but also some of the social implications embodied in words are, as it is the case for the custom labelled "ukuhlonipha".

In 19th century and early 20th century Xhosa or Zulu and English dictionaries, the verb "ukuhlonipha" was either defined as to express bashfulness, shyness or timidity (Döhne 1857: 138; Kropf 1899: 154; Kropf and Godfrey 1915: 161), to behave respectfully and express modesty (Bryant 1905: 255; Colenso 1861: 193; Kropf and Godfrey 1915: 161; Perrin 1855: 66), or as an expression of shame and fear (Ayliff 1846: 188; Davis 1872: 80). Nowadays, the *Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa* (Tshabe and Shoba 2021 [2006]: 775) defines '*u-hlonipho*' as "the *hlonipha* custom", '*uku-hlonipha*' as "to give respect" and '*isi-hlonipho*' as "respect shown to chiefs and other people of superior rank; etiquette, manner of behaving towards such people or in their presence" or "*hlonipha* word, *hlonipha* vocabulary". None of the lexical entries of "hlonipha" directly referred to ukuhlonipha as a custom before the word '*in-hlonipho*' was added in Kropf and Godfrey's dictionary (1915), and defined it as "the custom to which a married woman shows reverence for her in-law" (1915: 161). However, dictionaries published after 1855 did systematically offer a brief remark to explain the principles of ukuhlonipha as a custom.

In 1857, the missionary Jacob L. Döhne defined ukuhlonipha as a custom "between nearest relations" and "exclusively applied to the female sex" and presented an example of their "habit of inventing new names for the members of the family" with the word *amehlo* (en. eyes) that would be replaced by *amakangelo* (en. lookings) if a male-in-law was called UMehlo (Döhne 1857: 189). Döhne even described

isihlonipho as "izwi lefifazi, i.e., the women-word or language" (Döhne 1857: 189), being the earliest to label the linguistic aspect of ukuhlonipha as a specific register or vocabulary of women – a century later, Finlayson's research (1978, 1982, 1984) would lead her to label 'isihlonipho sabafazi' an identified list of words commonly used by women behaving according to ukuhlonipha rules. In 1861, the Bishop of Natal John W. Colenso also defined ukuhlonipha as a "behaviour of a woman towards the chief members of her husband's family" and illustrated the linguistic strategy with the word *isamkelo* replacing *isandla* (en. hand) if a male-in-law were to be named USandla (Colenso 1861: 193). In 1872, the Wesleyan missionary William J. Davis, in a trilingual dictionary of Xhosa, Zulu and English, also defines ukuhlonipha as a custom of the women, but considers that the custom arouses from "a superstitious fear or shame of being near" the male-in-laws (Davis 1872: 80). Moreover, Davis explicitly states that the word "uku Hlonipa" refers to a linguistic custom of avoidance, then offering a more detailed description than the previous dictionaries.

At the end of the 19th century, a new definition of ukuhlonipha emerged. At the time, various accounts of ukuhlonipha had already been published. In 1900, the Wesleyan missionary Charles Roberts rephrased Colenso's definition to rectify the gender-stereotype and defined ukuhlonipha as "the behaviour of a people towards the chief members of their families", further stating that both wife and husband had to avoid names of certain of their in-laws (Roberts 1900: 58). This rephrasing is significant because it illustrates an evolution in the understanding of ukuhlonipha. A similar pattern was observable a year earlier in Berlin missionary Albert Kropf's *A Kaffir-English Dictionary* (1899). Indeed, while Roberts rephrased Colenso, Kropf rephrased Döhne, stating that ukuhlonipha was "generally not exclusively applied to the female sex" (Kropf 1899: 154), a definition that is also to be found in Kropf and Godfrey (1915).

Thus, by the beginning of the 20th century, the word "ukuhlonipha" was referenced as both a word of Xhosa or Zulu, and as the name of a custom applying to both men and women. Bryant's *A Zulu-English Dictionary* (1905) thorough account of ukuhlonipha can illustrate this shift of gender-understanding of the custom in lexicographic definitions. "Among the Zulus it touches mainly married women, although, as exceptional cases, the men, or indeed the whole tribe indiscriminately, may hlonipha the name of a renowned chief or ancestor […]" (Bryant 1905: 255).

However, it should be noted that even if Kropf (1899), Roberts (1900), Bryant (1905) and Kropf and Godfrey (1915) did not consider ukuhlonipha as "exclusively female" anymore, the accounts still focused on a gendered ukuhlonipha. Indeed, because they produced dictionaries, they focused on collecting and explaining words. Since ukuhlonipha restricts the language use of women more than the one of men (Finlayson 2002), the 'hlonipha' words provided in dictionaries – as lexical entries (Colenso 1861; Davis 1872; Döhne 1857; Kropf 1899) or lists (Bryant 1905; Kropf

and Godfrey 1915; Roberts 1895) – still accounted for a ukuhlonipha of women. Even Bryant (1905), who stands out from the tendency of describing a linguistic-only ukuhlonipha by introducing a "hlonipha of action", falls under the gendered description of the custom, both by its list of words (Bryant 1905: 738–746) to illustrate how the "practice naturally causes the speech of the women to differ very considerably from that of the men", and by constantly referring to a "she" to explain the rules of his "hlonipha of action" (Bryant 1905: 256).

4.3.2 Ukuhlonipha of women or ukuhlonipha of people? Early hints

As shown in dictionaries' definitions of the word "hlonipha" and the custom related to it, the general understanding of the custom throughout the 19th century was that of a women's behaviour, mainly linguistically-related. However, a closer look into ukuhlonipha accounts in the 19th century put to light descriptions suggesting how men had to behave according to the custom, as well as an early description of the custom focusing on men's relationship to ukuhlonipha.

In 1857, Joseph Shooter, chaplain to the British settlers in the then colony of Natal from 1850 to 1854, introduced its reader to the custom of ukuhlonipha by listing and explaining the rules from a man's point of view. Shooter had a unique approach to ukuhlonipha, being the one and only not to have focused on women when describing the custom. In an endnote relating to his explanation of the Zulu naming system, suggesting that ukuhlonipha restricts the use of the *igama* (the birth name), Shooter attempted to explain the family relationships in accordance with ukuhlonipha by illustrating both men and women' status within the family, but by mainly focusing on a man and his hlonipha referents.

> [4] The custom appears to prevail between a husband and his wives' mothers, (a man calls his father's wives his mothers); between a wife and her husband's father (until she have a child?) and the father's brothers; between a father and his son's wives (in the same hut*); between a mother and her daughter's husband (and his brothers?); between an uncle and his nephew's wives and niece's husband's wives, but not vice versâ (?). The asterisk indicates that the igama, in this case, is not within the custom. See p. 221 (Shooter 1857: 393–394).

Shooter described how a man was restricted by ukuhlonipha, having to "avoid her [wife's mother] society" (Shooter 1857: 46) or being forbidden to "enter a house in which his son's wife may happen to be" (Shooter 1857: 46), but he was also the first to suggest that the custom might "prove generally inconvenient" because of the patrilineal organisation of Zulu society. Therefore, as early as 1857, Shooter suggested that ukuhlonipha restrictions could be removed by "the present of an ox or cow, made by the man to the woman" (Shooter 1857: 47), an observation passed on by Bryant (1905) and later confirmed by Raum (1973) and Herbert (1990b).

Aside from Shooter's focus on men and ukuhlonipha, several accounts of the custom stated that the custom was not imposed only upon women. In 1850, the earliest explicit account of ukuhlonipha in Appleyard's *The Kafir Language* suggested that a political ukuhlonipha could be observed "amongst some of the Kafir tribes" (Appleyard 1850: 69–70). In 1858, Warner's account, reused by Holden (1866: 369), briefly stated that the son-in-law was placed "under certain restrictions towards her mother-in-law" as he "cannot enjoy her society, or remain in the same hut with her; nor can he pronounce her name" (Maclean 1968 [1858]: 93). In the early 1870s, David Leslie, a hunter close to the Zulu royal family and well acquainted with Zulu customs, gave a conference before the Natural History Association of Natal in which he thoroughly explained the custom of ukuhlonipha as applied to each Zulu individual. Indeed, while he stated that what he labelled 'family hlonipha' was "confined to the women as far as speech is concerned" (Leslie 1875: 172), he still suggested that "the son-in-law too will not call his mother-in-law by her name" (Leslie 1875: 173). Moreover, Leslie underlined how among the Zulu "the national Hlonipa is all the tribes omitting the King's name" and how what he labelled 'tribal hlonipha' was "merely that no individual of any of the tribes which now constitute Zulu, will use the name of their chief or his progenitors" (1875: 176).

In this way, it is clear that the authors experienced, observed or were told about the custom of ukuhlonipha as applied to both women and men, even if they always insisted on the women's behaviours, particularly with regards to its linguistic rules. The evolution of dictionaries definitions illustrates the transition from a women-only to an almost ungendered conceptualisation of the custom of ukuhlonipha – in the dictionaries – that was made possible by a few fine-grained accounts published throughout the 19th century, especially because two of those were written by influential men at the time (Leslie 1875; Warner 1858) and became primary sources within both the colonial and Western academic circles.

5 An imperial circulation of knowledge: ukuhlonipha between stereotypes

In the first part, I introduced the main circulation of knowledge identified in the 19th century accounts of ukuhlonipha, from Appleyard's *The Kafir Language* (1850) to Müller's *Lectures on the Science of Languages* (1863). In the second part, I have shown that a fair amount of accounts has been published throughout the 19th century, displaying descriptions of the custom as applied to women and as applied to men. However, in this part, I want to demonstrate how the circulation of knowledge, both within and beyond the South African context, contributed to embed a feminine

conceptualisation of ukuhlonipha that spread until the 21st century (Irvine and Gal 2000; Irvine and Gunner 2018).

The ambiguity of knowledge surrounding the custom of ukuhlonipha is simultaneous to the first account of the custom being published. Indeed, as stated earlier, Appleyard's description of ukuhlonipha is divided in two: an explicit depiction of "*ukuhlonipa*" as a linguistic custom of women, and a separate remark about a "kind of superstitious objection" supposedly applying to the whole community (Appleyard 1850: 69–70). Therefore, if one only takes description in which the custom is labelled as "ukuhlonipa", it becomes an object of knowledge as a linguistic custom of the women. However, when Müller's (1863) uses Appleyard's description, he took both remarks into account and suggested that ukuhlonipha was a custom applying to women within the family, but also to men with regards to the chiefs (Müller 1863: 47). Thus, ukuhlonipha entered the European academic circles as a general custom of the Nguni-language people, further divided into a set of gendered rules. However, the initial confusion was not yet to be erased. Indeed, while Tylor's account follows on Müller's, he introduced the political ukuhlonipha towards chiefs' names, but then stated that "it is also among the Kafirs that the peculiar custom of *uku-hlonipa* is found" (Tylor 1865: 147), dividing the political ukuhlonipha from what was then understood as the custom of ukuhlonipha, meaning a familial linguistic ukuhlonipha applying to women as Tylor proposes by quoting Döhne's account (1857). In a similar vein, Fradenburgh's account (1874) operates the same division between political ukuhlonipha and familial ukuhlonipha of women labelled as "ukuhlonipha" (Fradenburgh 1874: 39–40). Furthermore, other academic accounts of the custom inspired by Müller only introduce ukuhlonipha as a linguistic custom of the women (Fiske 1872: 223; Lang 1884: 84–85) to compare it with the Tahitian custom of pi'i, a custom that ironically enough resembles the rules of the political ukuhlonipha and not of the familial ukuhlonipha – as only noted by Lefèvre's comparative account of ukuhlonipha and pi'i in the *Encyclopédie Générale* (1871: 247).

While Appleyard's account cannot be easily defined as a gendered or ungendered description of ukuhlonipha – because they are both at the same time – academics nonetheless decided to underline its feminine aspect. But what can be said about the accounts that were explicitly non-gendered? Warner's account in *A Compendium of Kaffir Laws and Customs from Colonel Maclean* (1968 [1858]) and Leslie's account in his conference "The Native Custom of 'Hlonipha'" published in the posthumous book *Among the Zulus and Amatongas* (1875), were both the primary sources of a handful of academic accounts about ukuhlonipha. Moreover, Shooter's account of men and ukuhlonipha also became a primary source for the heavily referenced *The Golden Bough* of James Frazer (1900) and both the *Natural history of man: Africa* and *The uncivilised races of men in all countries of the world* of John G. Wood (1868, 1872), therefore slightly contributing to

counter the gender-stereotype behind narratives of ukuhlonipha in the academic landscape.

In 1879, in the same year and by the same author, Warner's in Maclean (1968 [1858]) and Leslie's (1875) detailed descriptions of ukuhlonipha finally reached European intellectual circles. James Anson Farrer, jurist specialised in the philosophy of justice, published a monograph, *Zululand and the Zulus* (1879a), and an essay, *Primitive manners and customs* (1879b), in which each account of the custom of ukuhlonipha is based on a different primary source. Farrer's contribution does add to the ambiguity of knowledge stated above, for he describes ukuhlonipha as a custom applying to women and to men in his monograph (1879a: 124–126), and as a linguistic custom of the women in his essay (1879b: 233–234).

In fact, the dissimilarity in Farrer's accounts somewhat originates from his primary sources. In Farrer's monograph, the primary source is the fine-grained account of David Leslie, who introduced a three-part ukuhlonipha, "the family, the tribal, and, in the case of the Zulus, the national" (Leslie 1875: 172), detailing how both women and men are expected to behave according to ukuhlonipha. Leslie's account was also relayed in the same way by the Scottish jurist John F. McLennan in *Studies in Ancient Histories. Second Series* posthumously published in 1896 and in James Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1900) – which had Fleming (1854), Shooter (1857), Maclean (1968 [1858]), Leslie (1875), Theal (1886) and Kranz (1880) as its primary sources. In Farrer's essay, the primary source is both Leslie's account and the early account written by John C. Warner. Farrer probably eclipsed the men part of ukuhlonipha to follow the path of most of the comparativist academics who focused on comparing pi'i and ukuhlonipha, since he introduces ukuhlonipha to support the similarity between ukuhlonipha and a linguistic custom of the "Caribs of the West Indian Archipelago" (Farrer 1879b: 233). Hence, Farrer appears to be the only author to have been influenced by Warner's account without suggesting the ukuhlonipha rules of the son-in-law. In fact, both John Lubbock, a British archeologist turned ethnologist and later politician, and Frederick Starr, an American anthropologist and geologist, provided a non-gendered explanation of ukuhlonipha based on Warner's account, in their respective essays *The origin of civilisation and the primitive condition of man* (1882: 14) and *Some first step in human progress* (1895: 235).

Overall, the custom of ukuhlonipha is either described as a women-only custom or as a custom having a great deal of implications for the women and few implications for the men. Even when the accounts offer a little explanation about ukuhlonipha as applied to men, it always appears more as a suggestion and less as a fact. Yet, ukuhlonipha was indeed a custom applying to men as it has recently been shown by Irvine and Gunner (2018) but it seems to have been erased from European academic theories of the 19th century.

To conclude, I want to underline the language stereotype that is concomitant to the gender stereotype. In fact, from all the above accounts and their interpretations, one can only notice how ukuhlonipha is depicted as a linguistic-only custom. However, the earliest description of ukuhlonipha identified in Alberti's *Description physique et historique des Cafres, sur la côte méridionale de l'Afrique* (1811) only introduces some non-linguistic implications of the custom such as the interdiction placed upon women with regards to cattle (Alberti 1811: 129) or the avoidance behaviours expected from father-in-law and daughter-in-law and from mother-in-law and son-in-law (Alberti 1811: 135). Moreover, in the colonial context of South Africa, accounts of the custom as implying specific social behaviours are reckoned in almost half of the publications, varying from a single sentence to suggest a physical avoidance of in-laws, to a paragraph to describe some spatial avoidances or daily interactions sociolinguistically governed by ukuhlonipha. Yet, in the academic publications, only five accounts do offer both linguistic and non-linguistic implications of ukuhlonipha, relying on Shooter (1857), Maclean (1968 [1858]) or Leslie (1875) as primary sources. In fact, the linguistic stereotype seems to account for the dichotomy between 'frontier linguistics' and 'imperial linguistics', as suggested by Deumert (2020). Nineteenth century Western accounts were embedded in a universal knowledge dynamic and ukuhlonipha could therefore be used as an example of the linguistic 'peculiarities' found around the world, as to support some civilised versus uncivilised language theories. Nineteenth century accounts from South Africa were embedded in the colonial administration's knowledge dynamic and illustrated the desire to fully understand people to turn them into "readable subjects" (Deumert 2020: 182), therefore, ukuhlonipha had to be understood as sociolinguistic rather than linguistic-only because it could not erase the social and political consequences of the custom within British-ruled South Africa.

6 Conclusions

The custom of ukuhlonipha entered the English-speaking knowledge dynamic as a linguistic object, in the writings of missionary linguists of the 1850s. Simultaneously, more personal writings such as monographs and life accounts offered another early narrative that included both the 'hlonipha of speech' and the 'hlonipha of action' – to use Bryant's terminology (1905). Nonetheless, the knowledge circulation from South Africa to Western intellectual circles indicates that the linguistic aspect of ukuhlonipha was the centre of attention, especially with regards to women. Considering the amount of knowledge written about ukuhlonipha, both as a linguistic and as a sociolinguistic custom throughout the 19th and early 20th century, this study illustrates the strong historical roots behind the folk rationalisation of ukuhlonipha

suggested by Irvine and Gal (2000: 47). Moreover, looking further into ukuhlonipha accounts offers an opportunity to (re)establish the significance of the custom during the colonial encounter, underlining how narratives of the custom can reveal a sense of cultural resistance over Christianity while also underlining how women could exercise agency by their observance of ukuhlonipha. Furthermore, given the linguistic-only and the women-only tendencies in the exogenous accounts of ukuhlonipha, it is necessary to engage in a discussion around ukuhlonipha with the underrepresented endogenous accounts produced by Nguni-speaking authors and informants (cf. James Stuart Archive; Mayaba 1972; Mncube 1949; Mzamane 1962; Soga 1917, 1931; Van Warmelo Collection).[9] It would indeed contribute to reveal the concomitant creation of knowledge in colonial-era South Africa, and further on in 20th century South Africa, and would perhaps expand, nuance, refute or even support the dominant narratives surrounding the custom of ukuhlonipha.

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9 The James Stuart Archive holds notebooks of interviews between James Stuart and Zulu-speaking informants and is part of the Campbell Collections at University of KwaZulu Natal in Durban; the Van Warmelo Collection holds manuscripts in Southern Bantu languages, including Nguni languages, and is part of the African Heritage Collection held at University of Pretoria.

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